

BEYOND FUEL FOR SACRED BODIES:
FOOD IN THE CONTEXT OF AN ADVENTIST ECOTHEOLOGY

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Doctor of Philosophy in Practical Theology

by
Gregory L. Hoenes

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has been presented to and accepted by
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Abstract

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This dissertation examines ecological tensions in Seventh-day Adventism arising from theological positions affirming creation and creation care, while also affirming the return of Christ, the destruction of the world, and the renewal of all things. The roots of ecological resistance embedded in Adventist historical, religious, doctrinal, social, and political development that make ecological consciousness and concern unlikely are carefully examined. I suggest that Adventism as an American Christian sect unconsciously parallels the cultural, political, and economic colonialism propagated by European powers and later by the United States as well. A postcolonial frame offers a way to affirm Adventisms and prioritize the voices of women and global dialogue partners in the literature reviewed. The practical theological task employs mixed-method action research in the development, implementation, and evaluation of a small group process built around pastor-participants. The group study utilized a mixed-pedagogical approach to ecological issues filtered through Adventist convictions around scripture and food practices. Grounded pedagogies of place and spiritual practices were employed to move toward core human desire and to inculcate a renewed desire to be inhabitants (Ayres 2019). The curriculum considers food in ethical and ecological terms, not merely as a fuel for sacred bodies. The results of both qualitative and quantitative analysis suggest such an approach has a transformative effect, navigating barriers to ecological focus and praxis. Suggestions toward a constructive Adventist ecotheology, limitations of research, and suggestions for future research are included.

Keywords

Adaptive Scholarship, Adventist, Adventisms, Adventist Ecofeminism, Adventist Ecotheology, Adventist Environmentalism, Adventists and Politics, Adventists and White Evangelical Fundamentalism, Barriers to Ecotheology, Creation Care, Ecology Curriculum, Food and Ecology, Food and Environment, Global Adventist Ecotheologies, Mixed Method Research, Practical Theology, Religious Education, Transformative Paradigm Research, Transformative Small Groups.

Dedication

To the Giver of all life and Lover of Creation.

To my wife, Jill, with gratitude for her blessing and support, love and care, graces and generousities, faith and encouragements.

To my son, Brennan, with all my hopes for an ecologically sustainable future, that he and his descendants might flourish.

To my mother, Sally J. Hoenes and *in memoriam*, my father, Russell. L. Hoenes, Jr. M.D.

It's my hope that the tremendous time and efforts that have diverted me from so many other worthy pursuits and meaningful relations will somehow contribute to the knowledges of both head and heart. May this effort move those who might read this dissertation and all that flows from it into a more eco-conscious mode of thinking, theologizing, and being in the world.

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List of Abbreviations

GC	General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
LLU	Loma Linda University
LSU	La Sierra University
NAD	North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists
PUC	Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
TSGPP	<i>Transformative Small Group Pilot Project</i>

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Formulation of the Problem

The Seventh-day Adventist Church philosophically and theologically operates from a constructed arc that moves from creation to re-creation, fall to redemption, protology to eschatology. The symmetry formed in this arc is seen by many adherents to Adventist faith as beautiful, even compelling. Within it, life is lived always with an eye to eschatological fulfillment of the promise of the second coming of Jesus (John 14:3). The time-space between incarnation and Parousia is the liminal “now and not yet” described by John Brunt in his book by the same title.¹

While Adventists understand sin and curses subsequently described in Genesis 3 to affect the entirety of the created order on Earth, Adventist soteriology is decidedly anthropocentric,² focusing on sin as the cause of all broken relationships. Humanity is the primary object of God’s salvific will, which is achieved through righteousness by faith through the grace of God manifest in the incarnate Christ, a willing and sufficient sacrificial Lamb. Though humans are “saved,” the rest of creation is destroyed by fire and the Earth is recreated, made anew. This asymmetry poses challenges to ecological concern and creation care.

¹ John Brunt, *Now and Not Yet* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald Publishing, 1987), 1-96. Brunt outlined six principles and ethics for living in this liminality.

² Adventist soteriology is complex as it involves Christ’s post-ascension priestly mediatorial role in the heavenly sanctuary as well as eschatological-judicial dimensions. Respected Adventist theologian Jon Paulien affirms that the atonement through the cross of Christ affects not just humans but the entire universe. He does not elaborate how this is so. The natural world is not the focus of his work, nor is Adventist thought related to sin and the remedy of the cross. See Jon Paulien, “Atonement—Accomplished at the Cross,” in *Salvation: Contours of Adventist Soteriology*, ed. Martin F. Hannah, Darius W. Jankiewicz, and John W. Reeve, Theological Studies 11 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2013).

Adventist anthropology is built on holism, which suggests bodily health is essential to mental and spiritual health. Bodily health (and so mental and spiritual health) and the theological concept of sanctification are related primarily by diet. For this and other reasons, diet becomes important for wholeness and holiness, the formation and care of sacred bodies, and preparation for life eternal to come.

It follows that there is a great deal of care and energy around food (vegetarian and vegan lifestyles) as vehicles to the health of the body³ as well as longevity⁴ in the Adventist Church. Within the frame of religious attentivity to food as fuel for sacred bodies,⁵ little attention is given to the ways the environment in which foods are grown and processed affect the quality or healthfulness of foods consumed. However, the role of food, food production, and foodways are starting to receive mention as vital to a healthy environment.⁶

A growing number of Adventist scholars, teachers, pastors, and laypersons are writing on food with reference to the ecological benefits of plant-based and vegetarian diets. Even so, the overwhelming focus in the literature remains both anthropocentric and individualistic, focused on health and longevity. Food is dominantly understood as fuel for the body, not as an ecological tool or means of salvation for the environment.

³ This is true for academic writings, in publications intended for lay consumption, the publications of E.G. White (co-founder of the church), in evangelistic modes of outreach, and in cookbooks and health seminars available in Adventist institutions, including hospitals.

⁴ “Loma Linda, California: A Group of Americans Living 10 Years Longer,” *Blue Zones*, n.d., <https://www.bluezones.com/exploration/loma-linda-california/>.

⁵ I owe the conceptual foundation of the phrases “food for sacred bodies” and “fuel for sacred bodies” to Sabate, Gelabert, Badilla, and Del Valle. See Ruben Sanchez Sabate, et al., “Feeding Holy Bodies: A Study on the Social Meanings of a Vegetarian Diet to Seventh-Day Adventist Church Pioneers,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 3 (2016): 1–8.

⁶ Loma Linda University is the leading Adventist institution publishing on this topic.

Adventist ecological thinking is challenged beyond anthropocentric ideas about salvation and diet. Theologically, the challenge has been framed eschatologically by Evangelicals and Adventists alike, because of the belief that Jesus is coming soon. At that time, He will destroy the Earth by fire (2 Peter 3:10) and will then make all things new (Revelation 21:5). Given the importance of the eschaton theologically and missionally, why should one care about saving the environment when God is going to destroy the world and recreate all things new anyway?

This apparent conundrum summarizes the most obvious theological barrier to ecological thinking as well as attitudinal and behavioral change. But this is not the only challenge. I suggest herein that embedded in Adventist DNA are characteristics and histories that make ecological consciousness and care unlikely. The historical movements from sect to church, the embrace of Fundamentalism as a response to modernism, and the rapid growth and mutation of the Evangelical wing of the church framed in conservative U.S. politics, economics, personal rights, and individualism offer other barriers and places of resistance. Though arising from a sincere desire to fulfill the “gospel commission” (Matthew 28), I suggest that the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an American Christian sect unconsciously paralleled the cultural, political, and economic colonialism propagated by European powers, and later by the United States as well.

As of this writing, there is no extant comprehensive, constructive, or systematic Adventist ecotheology. Such an ecotheology would need to take into account the full range of doctrinal affirmations, offering both biblical and environmental hermeneutics capable rendering doctrine in ecological terms. Doctrine would need to be viewed through an ecofriendly lens in order to guide the ecotheological reflection from which to develop ecological practices. This dissertation will offer suggestions toward a constructive Adventist ecotheology and tackle the

practical theological task of constructing, piloting, and evaluating a transformative small group curriculum for pastors based upon these suggestions.

The practical theological task in this research, the *Transformational Small Group Curriculum Pilot Project* (TSGPP), will seek to understand the transformative potential of a small group seminar experience for pastors that takes the idea of an Adventist ecotheology seriously and offers a curriculum that considers food in ethical and ecological terms, not just as fuel for bodies in pursuit of sanctification. The purpose of this study is to see if a mixed-pedagogical approach to ecological issues, filtered through Adventist convictions around scripture and food in a small group format, can increase pastoral interest in ecotheology and provide motivation to incorporate ecotheological insights and tools in pastoral ministry.

Thesis

Beyond Fuel for Sacred Bodies: Food in the Context of an Adventist Ecotheology seeks to understand the complex relationships between food, theology, and ecology in diverse Adventisms in the Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (SECC). I propose that a small group study with pastors addressing the question of Adventist food practices in light of global ecological concerns, framed in the relatedness of all created things; human systems of domination and exploitation; personal narratives; relocation of the loci of eschatological concerns; Sabbath as an ecological practice; and ecology as a form of soteriology, may offer a transformational way to move diverse Adventisms toward a more conscious embrace of ecology as an Adventist concern and loci of effort.

Dissertation Summary

The remainder of this first chapter will attend to my social positionality and those biases of which I am aware and that I may bring to this work. Great care is given with respect to

representational language around “Adventism(s).” I name and explain the varieties, the most common variant in the United States, and the global nature of that variant’s influence.

Food is offered as dialectical bridge between ecology and theology. Food is implicated in the specific questions that guide my research. These questions focus on theology, power dynamics, and the pedagogies that answer or disrupt the various disconnections that hinder ecological thinking and a robust ecotheology.

Chapter one ends with brief discussion of extant research in the Adventist context. I also delineate the contributions of this original work. This section is followed by a discussion of hermeneutical methods, particularly those methods used constructively or negatively in extant ecotheological work. Hermeneutical questions are at the heart of the theological challenges Adventists face in being more ecologically minded.

The literature review in chapter two focuses on Adventist thinkers and writers who have published in the areas of ecology, environment, and ecotheology. Where possible, food was used as a qualifying overlay. I highlight the significant work done while naming the circumstances that have given rise to Adventist scholarship in this area. Here, priority was given to female voices, including theologians, pastoral respondents, and writers; to voices from the global south; and then to male Australian, European, North American scholars with key contributions.

Chapter three names the complexities around structural, socio-political, and theological barriers to an Adventist embrace of ecology. Adventist ecological knowledge does not appear to have been transformative. In many circles, ecology is a political trigger point, a point of division and dissention. This chapter interrogates the historical rise of Adventism in context, Adventist exceptionalism and apocalypticism, and politics and Fundamentalist theologies, to name both the reasons why Adventists are not more ecologically interested and aware and the barriers to

ecological engagement.

Chapter four takes a turn in the direction of a second literature review focusing on select dialogue partners. Non-religious curricula with specialties such as “teen urban youth,” or “common core compliance” were consulted for pedagogical ideas and moves as well as educational theory and praxis. Religious curricula were also consulted, offering insights such as the use of spiritual disciplines as a pedagogy for loving and caring for creation. The insights and tools discussed here become the foundation of the intervention—the developed pedagogy.

Chapter five begins with a discussion of methods. While in some cases the “methods” section is an entire dissertation chapter, the primary methodological intervention in this case is the curriculum itself. A general discussion of methods is followed by a full description of the design and implementation of the intervention (the TSGPP) as conducted. The descriptive move is from macro to micro. An outline of the curriculum for each day is presented. Participant recruitment processes, communication tools, timing of sessions, and demographics of the pastor-participant group are also explored.

Chapter six explores results. In vivo coding yielded explanatory lenses and clusters of ideas around fear, fatigue, futility, and facility. These lenses were explored to reveal additional, previously unnamed barriers to an Adventist ecotheology and ecological living. These lens/clusters were also employed to discuss the context of love and latent (but sometimes explicit) desires to move toward creation, despite the barriers and challenges, to become better inhabitants. Pre-TSGPP and post-TSGPP surveys offered the possibility of comparing “before” and “after” responses to the intervention, with special attention to shifts and transformational change.

Chapter seven discusses the emergent ecotheology derived from the group process and

briefly summarizes possibilities that were only implicit in the literature review. While arguably a type of result, the group processes themselves do not reveal the shifts necessary to demonstrate transformation, but they suggest movement in that direction. Conclusions are then discussed in support of the thesis. The surveys and the in vivo processes reveal significant movement, shifts, and changes toward the ecological after the small group process. Here, the limitations of the scope, results, and applicability beyond the participants are carefully named. The chapter ends with a few suggestions for future study based in part on the limitations of scope and scale in this dissertation and also on emergent questions embedded within the research parameters.

Social Positionality

As an emergent academic field of inquiry, “Whiteness studies” explore this cultural construct as one that carries both privilege and the weight of the responsibility to deconstruct the racist underpinnings it both historically and presently evidences. As a White male, my task is to demonstrate care for voices outside the normativity of “Whiteness” that still dominates in North American Adventist academic realms as well as “Adventisms” foreign to my own preferences and experience.

I acknowledge that my light skin color and ancestral heritage differentiates my experience in the world in profound and unambiguously advantageous ways. I do not have any founded concerns for my life should I be pulled over in a traffic stop. If I should be arrested or jailed, I have no reason to think I would be treated worse by any law enforcement agency because of my ethnicity or color.⁷

⁷ To this point and for historical reference, George Floyd, a Black man, was suffocated by Derek Chauvin, a White man and Minneapolis Police Officer on May 25, 2020 while being arrested for allegedly passing a fake \$20.00 bill. Tragically illustrative, this murder and multiple other unjust murders of people of color occurred during the writing of this dissertation.

I am an American. Of course, the hubris in claiming the word “American” for the fifty United States and not for Canada, the Central American countries, or the South American continent belies the political privilege that has come with economic imperialism and hegemony, cultural colonization, and a system of governance built for the benefit of those resembling its founders. I seek to be aware of the presumptions embedded in language that play to my privilege.

While writing in the context of the rhetoric of fear, the erection of border walls, and the filling of detention camps with those seeking asylum, the privilege of citizenship becomes even more pronounced. In the age of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) squad raids; increased restrictions around immigration; threats of deportation against Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA); and threats to revoke the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act), birthright citizenship means that I have no fear of deportation, displacement, arrest, or imprisonment on grounds of being an “illegal.” I seek to honor the ways in which the global immigration crisis is both a human and ecological one.

As a cis-gendered heterosexual married male, acceptance of my sex, gender, and sexual orientation and expression has not been an issue in the Christian communion or in society at large. I have been granted a level of trust, privilege, access, and employment not granted to members of the LGBTQI community anywhere in my religious context. There are also precious few women in Adventist ministry, their voices often muted. As an ordained Minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I am aware that ordination has served as an instrument of gender demarcation and discrimination in the global context. While this is not the focus in this study, where relevant I hope to demonstrate awareness of how my views have been shaped by maleness, heteronormativity, and patriarchy.

Age has been a significant factor in the personal accumulation of capital resources, denominational recognition, and career advancement, as well as in life experience and maturity. Age shapes perspective, as does the era in which one lived. My worldview is shaped by the ecological, social, and political changes that have taken place over a span of decades.

My race, gender, sexual preference, religious preference, and socioeconomic status have never been a barrier to my employment or economic opportunity. The social and economic structures that have allowed for accumulation and affluence were not built by me. Even so, I benefit as relative affluence affords excellent healthcare, quality housing, safer neighborhoods, better policing, access to a greater variety of healthy foods, pursuit of higher education, travel, and being able to focus beyond survival.

This work examines ecological issues disproportionately affecting Black and Brown bodies, the Indigenous, and the global poor. Writing as a member of the dominant ethnic group in the United States may be seen by some as inherently problematic. American Whites have wielded the colonizing cultural and religious powers responsible for significant aspects of extant global disparities and the ecological ruin brought on by energy-intensive living built around disposables and consumption.

Because ecotheology is situated and self-conscious,⁸ my social positionality raises numerous issues that have consequences for this work and beyond. In light of these realities, the literature reviewed in this dissertation gives priority to the voices of women and global dialogue partners. It is with humility, self-reflectivity, and a hermeneutic of appreciation that I study and critically engage these works.

⁸ Celia Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology: Theology for a Fragile Earth* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), x.

Biases

Adventist writings on the environment tend to rely heavily on biblical texts. In my review and assessments of these writings, I am aware of my general hermeneutical bias against the “historical-biblical method” of interpreting scripture, what the current President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC), Ted Wilson, terms a “simple reading” of scripture.⁹ This method explicitly rejects biblical criticism and the underlying modernist and materialist leanings of these methods.

I see the “simple reading” as an expression of literalism and Fundamentalism. Because it is easy and offers the appearance of faithfulness to the text, the “simple reading” lends the weight of apparent truth, rejecting modes of analysis and interpretative tools that might help us unpack texts that presently pose social or moral challenges within contemporary society (such as questions on gender, for example). The “simple reading” leans toward superficiality cloaked in textual “clarity,” thereby increasing the perception of biblical authority.

My educational and institutional choices and achievements, geographic locale, and the environmental nature of my concerns reflect a “progressive” bias. I am admittedly anxious to deconstruct barriers to ecological civilization despite the generally “Evangelical-Fundamentalist” religious context in which I worship and serve.¹⁰ I am aware that the concerns raised herein are not likely to find universal resonance within Adventism(s). Even so, I take on this topic because I

⁹ Ted N. C. Wilson, “Everyone a Sower” (2015 Annual Council, Silver Spring, MD, October 15, 2015), <https://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story3336-everyone-a-sower>.

¹⁰ I use the descriptors “progressive” and “evangelical fundamentalist” because I am not sure that the more commonly used “liberal” and “conservative” descriptors carry consensus around meaning anymore. Further, there is a problematic artificiality to these distinctions in the global context. Where do confessing Christians fit in the global religious and philosophical continuum?

care deeply for my church and my world. An ever-growing urgency surrounds the issues and concerns for Earth, our home.

The TSGPP assumes *agency and choice* on the part of the participant. The survey questions given to participants assume broad access to information, including responsible media sources. The small group process assumes that knowledge and experience combined can be transformational, particularly when conveyed narratively and engaged compassionately.

My profound conviction is that the Adventist Church ought to be engaging the broad questions around how we ought to live and relate to the world as human beings. This bias speaks to life as material and finite beings, creatures who are necessarily a part of an environment that must be sustaining *and* sustained. It is not about religion or theology *per se* but rather, as Jennifer Ayres writes, about how we are acculturated to “inhabit.”¹¹ The effort of naming these biases aims toward minimizing their impacts, hopefully allowing my academic colleagues and future readers to appreciate the essential points and possibilities elucidated herein.

Situatedness and Representational Language: “Adventist” and “Adventism(s)”

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is not monolithic. Rather, it is global, dynamic, and complex. Naming Adventism(s) is critical for my self-location within the church. As a means to accurately and fairly¹² represent disparate, if related, groups within Adventism(s), this naming may possibly reveal additional areas of bias. It also serves to clarify the identity of named subject groups in this research. Naming Adventism(s) answers the question of how the representational language used in this dissertation honors this complexity.

¹¹ Jennifer R. Ayres, *Inhabitation: Ecological Religious Education* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019)

¹² Per my stated biases, I fear this may be partly aspirational.

In 1994, *Adventist Today* named four different “Adventisms,” noting that “mainstream,” “evangelical,” “progressive,” and “historic” Adventisms are all built on positionalities of “doctrine, theology, and sociology.”¹³ As Walters noted in his editorial at the time, “Each of the four camps ... can legitimately claim to be authentically Adventist.”¹⁴ None of these “Adventisms” addresses global typologies, though a colonial hermeneutic may be helpful here. The four Anglo-American typologies do reflect the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists (NAD).¹⁵

In 1994, Kenneth Wood identified “mainstream” Adventism as that which would be most closely connected to the global work of the General Conference, with historical reference to the church providentially raised up as a “remnant” church, living out Revelation 14.¹⁶ This type might also carry the nomenclature of “traditional” or “orthodox,” or perhaps even “sectarian.” Wood’s understanding of how this Adventism deals with hermeneutics will be of interest later.

Describing “Evangelical” Adventism, Michelle Rader and pastors David VanDenburgh and Larry Christoffel wrote, “Evangelical Adventism is authentic Adventism, Adventism as God meant it to be,”¹⁷ building on the idea embedded in εὐαγγέλιον. Evangelical Adventism offers a correction to Adventism’s historic reliance on Ellen G. White by holding to the Bible as the “only basic rule of faith and practice.”¹⁸ It seeks to center “Christ and the authority of the Scripture

¹³ James Walters, “Editorial: Inside Adventist Today,” *Adventist Today* 2, no. 1 (January/February 1994): 2.

¹⁴ Walters, “Editorial,” 2.

¹⁵ Walters, “Editorial,” 2.

¹⁶ Kenneth H. Wood, “The Mother of Us All: Mainstream Adventism,” *Adventist Today* 2, no. 1 (January/February 1994): 4.

¹⁷ Michelle Rader, David VanDenburgh, and Larry Christoffel, “Evangelical Adventism: Clinging to the Old Rugged Cross,” *Adventist Today* 2, no. 1 (February 1994): 6.

¹⁸ Rader, VanDenburgh, and Christoffel, “Evangelical Adventism,” 6.

in ... doctrine and evangelism.”¹⁹ This dissertation will argue that Evangelical Adventism has ideologically moved “right,” toward what might presently be termed White Evangelical Fundamentalism, and it will problematize this in terms of ecology.

In his September Diversity lecture at Newbold College (2017), Wim Altink, President of the Netherlands Union of Seventh-day Adventists, added the word “fundamentalist” to “evangelical” when naming the four Adventisms and substituted “orthodox” for “mainline.”²⁰ He is onto something. This addition rightly speaks to the evolution of these two types.

Next, New Testament professor Madelynn Jones Haldeman wrote on “progressive” Adventism, identifying it with a mixed ethos of intellectual curiosity, openness, and relaxed approaches to historic standards. She believes that there is not just a social consciousness in “progressive” Adventism but also a recognition that scripture does not address all questions. It is partly because of this that scripture deserves deeper study. The key question centers on what resources there are that might address contemporary issues.²¹

Finally, Ralph Larson names “historic” Adventism as the original Adventism.²² The viewpoint that the faith (meaning the system of interpretation, practice, and belief) was “delivered”²³ to the church founders is key. “Delivered” truths carry enhanced authority, adding sectarian connection to biblical revelation and essentializing the gospel frame as “eternal and

¹⁹ Rader, VanDenburgh, and Christoffel, “Evangelical Adventism,” 8.

²⁰ Helen Pierson, “One For All and All For One: Appreciating Dissidence in the Church,” *Spectrum*, September 15, 2017, <https://spectrummagazine.org/article/2017/09/15/one-all-and-all-one-appreciating-dissidence-church> accessed August 17, 2020.

²¹ Madelynn Jones-Haldeman, “Progressive Adventism,” *Adventist Today* 2, no. 1 (January/February 1994): 9–11.

²² Ralph Larson, “Historic Adventism: Remembering to Trust and Obey,” *Adventist Today* 2, no. 1 (January/February 1994): 12.

²³ Larson, “Historic Adventism,” 12.

unchangeable,²⁴ the same as the attributed characteristics of the God who delivered these truths.

“Historical Adventists” see that their “calling is to honour [*sic*] and to preserve the beliefs that made the Seventh Day [*sic*] Adventist Church the remnant church for the final days.”²⁵ Historical Adventists aim “to purge all vestiges of what they call new theology from the church.”²⁶

These four typologies are often referenced, particularly by Adventist Scholars. Enrique Ramos uses a comparative approach. He compares the “doctrinal position” of “traditional” and “evangelical” Adventism through distinctive Adventist doctrines and their respective understandings and use of Ellen G. White’s writings. Ultimately, he makes the point that these iterations of Adventism are “historical evolution[s]” and essentially theological.²⁷ Later, I will say more about the underlying hermeneutical questions that drive these differences.

In addition, David Hamstra's blog “Four Adventisms”²⁸ (evangelical, apocalyptic, recovery, and social justice) builds a typology based on tensions in the “Anglo-American” Adventist context. His distinctions are intuitive, not demonstrated. Nevertheless, his polarities of “Immanent/Transcendent,” “Justifying/Affirming,” and “Sanctifying/Disciplining” yield results in analysis that are interesting. A germane example states that “while apocalyptic Adventists and social justice Adventists can both advocate vegetarianism, for the former it is primarily to

²⁴ Larson, “Historic Adventism,” 13.

²⁵ Enrique Ramos, “Traditional and Evangelical Adventism: A Comparative Study of the Two Main Theological Perspectives Among the Seventh-Day Adventists” (M.A.T., Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa, North West University, 2006), 8.
https://silo.tips/queue/traditional-and-evangelical-adventism-a-comparative-study-of-the-two-main-theolo?&queue_id=-1&v=1602820685&u=MTIuMTcwLjIzNi4zNA==

²⁶ Ramos, “Traditional and Evangelical Adventism,” 9. The focus of this purge is the book *Questions on Doctrines*, which was aimed at explaining Adventist theology to evangelicals in a bid for acceptance as something other than a cult.

²⁷ Ramos, “Traditional and Evangelical Adventism,” 3.

²⁸ David Hamstra, “Four Adventisms,” *Apokalupto* (blog), February 18, 2018, <https://apokalupto.blogspot.com/> accessed August 18, 2020.

prepare the body to receive the Holy Spirit, and the later, where it is only to heal creation, excludes the former.”²⁹ While the literature doesn’t support his either/or conclusion, Hamstra identifies an important difference of perspective about vegetarianism in terms of fuel for sacred bodies as opposed to environmental benefit. These differences still mostly fit within the mainline and progressive frames named in 1994.

As a child and young person, I experienced “mainstream” Adventism, with all the sub-cultural appurtenances typical of the period.³⁰ Carmen Holland calls this “classical Adventism” noting a pertinent anomaly that describes my family and subculture perfectly:

...there was and is a sociological anomaly in Adventism because of its health education emphasis. Adventists have gone into the medical profession ... creat(ing) inside its subculture an upper middle and lower upper-class group of relatively affluent physicians. By the 1970 and 1980s, in larger and larger numbers, the impact of their changing lifestyles and widening intellectual horizons had eroded the loyalty of significant segments of this group to classical sectarian Adventism. Thus mid-20th century Adventism in North America created a relatively small but influential group of upward mobile individuals within First World Adventism.³¹

For years I thought the group described in the paragraph above was normative, though I now realize how privileged and sectarian it was 45 years ago.

Still evolving personally and academically, I speak most often from the “progressive” frame, particularly in terms of my approach to biblical hermeneutics. I resonate with many of the ambitions described in Hamstra's “Social Justice Adventism,” which employs the theologically descriptive notion of “immanence” to describe how to understand the divine as we live in the

²⁹ Hamstra, “Four Adventisms.”

³⁰ These included strict Sabbath observance, vegetarianism, a steady diet of Adventist story books, records, and periodicals, as well as education.

³¹ Carmen Holland, “The Legacy of Neal Wilson,” Journal, *AdventistToday.Org* (blog), May 2011, <https://atoday.org/the-legacy-of-neal-wilson/>.

world.³² As an administrator and pastor, I often reference the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an organizational entity, global but not monolithic.

The majority of mentions in this work are about Adventism as a whole, which, as I will argue, is increasingly Evangelical and Fundamentalist in character in its present iteration. The story of Adventism and ecology is inextricably tied to the decline of mainstream (a.k.a. mainline, classical, traditional, orthodox) Adventism, the historic complement of movements in Adventism that mirrored American evangelicalism, and the concomitant resurgence of Fundamentalism.

This is not an exhaustive typological/sociological study, only an attempt to define and self-locate within the spectrum of Adventisms and to offer the reader a clearer sense of the meaning herein of the terms, “Adventist,” “Adventism,” and “Adventisms.” This dissertation presupposes “Adventisms” as normative. Hybridity between typologies offers additional possibilities and would suggest this may be a path toward understanding global Adventisms. As there are multiple forms of Adventism, both historic and present, local and global, this research suggests that a decolonial Adventist ecotheology makes room for this multiplicity.

Food and Ecotheology

Why use food as a lens for ecotheology? Food matters! Everything about food impacts the environment. Whether food is hunted and gathered or husbanded and farmed, methods of food production have a critical environmental impact. Land use ethics either contribute to conservation and soil viability or allows for their erosion and depletion. Water tables and

³² Here I think Hamstra stretches the notions of his “Immanent/Disciplining” quadrant, historically tracing discipline (sanctification) from John H. Kellogg to social justice, which is a misread of both. Kellogg was obsessed with perfecting the body through a healthy diet, a lifestyle. While lifestyle was connected historically to social justice vis-a-vis temperance, dress reform, and other movements E.G. White endorsed, Hamstra’s characterization of social justice minimizes the more essential tasks before us today in terms of human dignity and freedom.

watersheds are affected by food production as well as by the contaminants present in herbicides, pesticides, and commercially produced fertilizers. Greenhouse gas emissions are significantly increased through the mechanized production, processing, transport of foods, and factory farming of animals of all kinds.

Food is connection, tying one to family, culture, community and faith. Food is evocative, transporting one back to places visited, shared life experiences, memories ...! Food is instructive, a cultural ambassador, teaching about cultures foreign to one's own. Food is pedagogy, for through and with it one can teach,³³ embed new information, and make new memories. Food has an aesthetic beauty, with sights and sounds and smells of wonder. Food is play, joy-filled; just watch a toddler eat! Food has the nutrients and energy the body requires to live. Food is also an easy and socially acceptable addiction, perhaps in part because of its aesthetics and allure, pleasure and comfort, sustenance and energy, sociability and connection, routineness and novelty, and essential character.

Food is also deeply embedded in sacred texts. The Hebrew Bible and Christian New Testament are full of stories, parables, rites, and rituals involving food. These vary from the Edenic diet to Esau's prowess as hunter and Jacob's skills as a shepherd; famine in Egypt and manna in the desert; Elisha's miracle of the olive oil and Jesus' of water to wine. And, of course the many fish stories! Jesus was known by and repeatedly revealed in the breaking of bread (Luke 24:30-31). Food and farming are ubiquitous in scripture.

Food, as should be clear, is implicated in both ecology and theology. Using food as an ecological lens might resonate strongly with communities that value text as a way to understand

³³ Michel Desjardins, "Teaching about Religion with Food," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 7, no. 3 (2004): 153-158.

how to live. Exegetes and theologians such as JoAnn Davidson have done the careful work of plumbing the depths of biblical texts to bring ecological living, framed in language of “creation care” or “Earth stewardship,” to light.

Guiding Questions for Research

The questions that have led to this research on Adventists and ecology, particularly viewed through the lens of food, fall into three categories: 1) theology, 2) power dynamics as manifested in Whiteness, colonial complicity, hierarchical structures, and Fundamentalist thinking, and 3) pedagogies that may answer or disrupt the theological disconnect as well as the power structures and dynamics that hinder compassion and care for the creation and development of a robust ecotheology.

1. Theological Questions: The theological questions stem from beliefs embedded in the very name of the church. Firstly, the “Seventh-day” Sabbath stands as a memorial of creation (Exodus 20:11) and redemption (Deuteronomy 5:15). The church maintains the view that the creation timeline is an actual six-day creation week culminating in Sabbath rest and holds to a young-Earth timeline based on Ellen White’s apparent endorsement and frequent referencing of the Ussher chronology.³⁴ There seems to be an asymmetry between the valuation of timelines and timeframes on the one hand, and the value of what was created by God in creation on the other. Why might this be so?

Secondly, the “advent” in “Adventist” references the coming of the Kingdom of God in Christ. This happened first in Judah 2,000 years ago. It is also anticipated in the *Parousia*, the second coming of Christ in glory at an unknowable, yet future, time. Adventist literature tends to

³⁴ Warren H. Johns, “Ellen G. White and Biblical Chronology,” *Ministry Magazine*, April 1984, 20.

focus on these events eschatologically, not incarnationally. Kingdom life ought to inform the way we live in the here and now, and by extension, how we ought to relate to both the natural and human-made environments. The eschatological focus lends itself to the question, “Why care for creation when the Creator (John 1) is coming in glory to cleanse the Earth by fire (2 Peter 3:10) and make all things new (Revelation 21:5)?”

2. Power Dynamics: Questions about hierarchies, American consumerism, Whiteness, and the specter of the colonial frame raised by the global export of Adventism as an American religion not only call up embedded hermeneutical concerns but also elucidate the reasons why Adventists do not have a robust or comprehensive theology of the Earth. What kinds of tensions are there in the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church around the expression of multiplicity *without domination*? How do top-down applications of power disrupt organic capacities to respond outside of the capitalist frame of consumption? How is love manifested in the SDA church beyond colonial domination of both people and environment?

3. Transformative Pedagogies: The pedagogical questions seek to be responsive to the issues raised above. If a comprehensive Adventist ecotheology were to be written, what praxes might inform such an ecotheology? How might it be transmitted pedagogically? What narratives support a movement toward what Jennifer Ayres terms “inhabitation”?

Extant Research

Extensive academic work has been done on the related subjects of environmentalism; environmental ethics, environmental rights, animal rights, and environmental law; conservation, preservation, ecology, and various iterations of eco-consciousness and green living including permacultures, ecovillages, and sustainable living; ecojustice; ecophilosophy and deep ecology; ecofeminism, ecofeminist philosophy; and political ecology. Religion is often a lens or overlay

to much of the above. Many of the fields mentioned have been looked at through ethics, religious values, world religions, and Christian theologies. Extensive academic work has also been done on ecospirituality, ecotheology, creation care, and environmental stewardship.

These fields narrow considerably within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It seems that faculty in the sciences and humanities are doing some of the best work within the Adventist Church in addressing the question of ecology, utilizing a variety of disciplines including ethics, philosophy, literature, education, biology (biodiversity), public health, dietary sciences, and more. Some Adventist colleges and universities are now offering courses on “ecology” as part of a biology curriculum, and “ecology” is part of the Biology curriculum in Adventist secondary education.³⁵ In Adventist higher education, Loma Linda University Department of Earth and Biological Sciences offers a B.S. degree in Environmental Sciences.³⁶ William K. Hayes, the Interim Program Director, also serves as Director of the Center for Biodiversity and Conservation Studies³⁷ also connected with the University.

Despite these very positive developments in Loma Linda and elsewhere, ecology *as a theological subject* is tended to by a very small group of theologians and biblical scholars working with environmental themes as awareness grows. A few have gestured towards an Adventist ecotheology, though many of these writings fall within preferred categories of “stewardship” or “care for creation.” There remains no comprehensive or systematic Adventist

³⁵ Office of Education. “Ecology.” Secondary Science Standards in Seventh-day Adventist Schools. North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015.

³⁶ “Environmental Sciences - B.S.,” Loma Linda University: A Seventh-day Adventist Organization, accessed October 12, 2020, <http://llucatalog.llu.edu/medicine/environmental-sciences/>.

³⁷ William K. Hayes, “About Us,” Center for Biodiversity and Conservation Studies: Loma Linda University, 2011, <https://www.lomalindabiodiversity.org/about.html>.

ecothology, and neither are there uniquely Adventist practical curricular resources for pastors or congregations to move into a more ecofriendly space.³⁸

Originality and Contributions

My research will move theoretically toward suggestions for a constructive ecotheology. This is important because while some excellent work has been done on ecological issues by Adventist theologians and writers outside the theological disciplines, more is warranted. Little of this important work has made it into popular Adventist journals and the imagination of the membership. An Adventist constructive project in ecotheology is desperately needed.

Pastors, teachers, theologians, religious educators, church ministry leaders, and ultimately members can benefit from better understanding how Adventist faith might be compatible with and contribute towards ecotheology, ecology, and ecological practices. This is particularly the case as relates to food. This practical theological project pilots a small group intervention that is meant to inform at the level of the heart and offer tools for pastors to themselves engage ecotheology and ecology in a transformative and ultimately public way.

The TSGPP invites pastors to gather in a small group setting to listen, share, encounter, and experience the ecological crisis while being directed to the theological and social resources already available to them. The goal is to transform understandings, practices, and local pedagogies on the subject. Emphasis is local, on lived environments; Adventisms as represented by the global diversity of the church; and food as a natural and critical way for Adventists to engage ecology.

³⁸ The Adventist Learning Community is the premiere North American Division resource offering courses in areas of interest related to church life. As of October 12, 2020, there is no mention of ecology, creation care, conservation, environmentalism, or earth stewardship in the curriculum. The courses available on the subject of stewardship do not mention earth stewardship. See <https://www.adventistlearningcommunity.com/>.

All the early public environmental warnings from the 1960's onward; all the academic work in myriad disciplines involving some aspect of planetary health or justice that have emerged for both descriptive and prescriptive purposes; all the biblical studies and theological writings and work surrounding the Doctrine of Creation (#6), and the Doctrine of Stewardship (#21) have not yielded a turning toward creation. They have not been transformative. This suggests Adventists are less ecologically aware and motivated than thirty years ago.

Presently, the Adventist Church does not have a curriculum designed for pastors or laypersons on ecological themes. There is scant evidence of preparation for engagement with the environmental crisis at hand.³⁹ My working assumption is that everyone needs to be equipped with tools for necessary and deep change, Adventists included.

Food, agricultural production, and foodways now commonly model the complex relationships between diet, health, social, and environmental justice. The juxtaposition of food and faith, while not new, offers both present and eschatological hope in Communion, community, and beyond. It pulls to what Adventists claim to be about—holism. No one is currently doing this kind of analysis and synthesis in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The Hermeneutical Frame

By definition, the hermeneutical task is the translation of what is ineffably beyond human understanding (in the realm of the divine) into terms understandable to humans.⁴⁰ Students of hermeneutics understand this involves both theology and law.⁴¹ Francis J. Mootz III reminds us

³⁹ Ben Holdsworth's work does aim squarely at this.

⁴⁰ Kivatsi Jonathan Kavusa, "Ecological Hermeneutics and the Interpretation of Biblical Texts Yesterday, Today and Onwards: Critical Reflection and Assessment," *Old Testament Essays* 32 (January 1, 2019): 229, <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2019/v32n1a13>.

⁴¹ Francis J. Mootz III, "Faithful Hermeneutics," *Michigan State Law Review* 361 (2009): 361.

that historically speaking, religious thinking and legal thinking were “intertwined” and “comingled practices defined authenticity a unitary truth for the community.”⁴² The Protestant Reformation moved “away from the authority of the author as secured by patristic practices and toward the discovery of truth through direct investigation of authoritative texts.”⁴³ This movement away from the authority of lived tradition to *sola scriptura* may be instructive in thinking of the ways in which sacred text is widely read in Adventist circles today.

Further, Mootz notes: “Gadamer insists that law and religion are not fixed texts to be decoded with hermeneutical methods; instead, both are historically-unfolding creations of meanings within different realms. Law and religion are *activities*. They are not simply areas of *study*.”⁴⁴ In short, Gadamer’s hermeneutic “is premised on the faith of the interpreter ... and interpretation is an ongoing response to a call that is never completed.”⁴⁵ Mootz labels this interplay “faithful,” for the text is a living, speaking thing, not “a historical riddle.”⁴⁶ This interplay is also why historical-critical methods preclude encounters with the text as “living” in the context of ontological futurity. “Faithful” hermeneutics go beyond forms of criticism (literary, historical, textual), engaging contemporary theories (interpretive strategies) like feminism, womanism, LGBTQI, indigenous, ecojustice, ecology—in other words, “socially, politically and institutionally situated”⁴⁷ readings.

⁴² Mootz III, “Faithful Hermeneutics,” 362.

⁴³ Mootz III, “Faithful Hermeneutics,” 362.

⁴⁴ Mootz III, “Faithful Hermeneutics,” 362.

⁴⁵ Mootz III, “Faithful Hermeneutics,” 364.

⁴⁶ Mootz III, “Faithful Hermeneutics,” 365.

⁴⁷ Kavusa, “Ecological Hermeneutics,” 231, quoting Hillary Marlow, *Biblical Prophets: Contemporary Environmental Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 85.

While not a hermeneutic *per se*, “privileging” serves as a filter for values, beliefs and practices. As Rogers notes, “Privileging of texts is a general problem for hermeneutics.”⁴⁸ There is a philosophical sense in which this is true, embedded in the questions of “truth” and “method.”⁴⁹ Ricoeur’s “rationality of interpretation” lies in tension with the privileging of text as a “subjective and irrational” interpretive process.⁵⁰ At stake is the question of the rationality of belief based in text altogether.

Privileging is also about what we choose to pay attention to when we read text. For example, does the eschatological question around environmentalism override the mandate to worship the Creator by demonstrating love for all creation? Is “rule” or “dominion” (Genesis 1:26) to be privileged above a Sabbath rest for the land (Leviticus 25:4)? Why is the Adventist version of “kosher” unconcerned with the question of how an animal is killed, but interested in “clean and unclean” standards around what type of fowl, fish, or beasts might be eaten for food?

What one decides to pay attention to matters. Ecological hermeneutics offers one frame from which to view the works engaged in this Dissertation—perhaps more importantly—with which to think about the various interpretive lenses and filters that might be applied and which of these offers direction for an Adventist ecotheology.

Adventist writers (and Evangelical writers in general) tend to eschatology without reference to Creation. There are those, however, seeking to find within the biblical text ecologically meaningful material demonstrating that the problem of the absence of Creation concern or eco-consciousness is hermeneutical, not textual or with orthodox Christian beliefs.

⁴⁸ William E. Rogers, “Ricoeur and the Privileging of Texts: Scripture and Literature,” *Religion & Literature* 18, no. 1 (1986): 1.

⁴⁹ Rogers, “Ricoeur and the Privileging of Texts,” 13.

⁵⁰ Rogers, “Ricoeur and the Privileging of Texts,” 14.

Kivatsi Jonathan Kavusa terms the latter “readings of recovery,” and the “Earth Stewardship” model is a very common example of this.

Beyond efforts to recover ecological meaning, revisionists view text in light of contemporary ecological issues. Santmire’s *Nature Reborn* is an example of this type of interpretive analysis.⁵¹ Kavusa’s reading of this is summarized thus: “revisionist readers claim to reshape ecologically the same tradition that has been largely interested by the issue of human salvation at the cost of non-human earth members.”⁵² The view of a hermeneutic of “revision” is to a “universal and eschatological purpose”⁵³ and lies between “recovery” and “resistance.” A more ancient cosmology ultimately grounds the reframing of this mode of Christian thought.

Readings of resistance go beyond recovery and take two forms: a pro-ecology form based on rejection of both anthropocentrism and the stewardship model, and a pro-text, biblical authority form. This latter type can mutate into a virulent anti-ecological position. This irony of interpretive privileging is characterized by a total dismissal of earth stewardship while embracing the end of the world as part of “God’s eschatological purposes.”⁵⁴

In the pro-ecology reading of resistance, “The interpreter reads the text ... as a kin, a relative and member within the earth community, sharing with it benefits and problems.”⁵⁵ (Ecofeminist readings might be thought of as a subset of this basic hermeneutical frame, though ecofeminism stands alone as a “social theory and political movement.”⁵⁶) Adventist and New

⁵¹ Paul H. Santmire, *Nature Reborn: The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000).

⁵² Kavusa, “Ecological Hermeneutics,” 245.

⁵³ Kavusa, “Ecological Hermeneutics,” 245.

⁵⁴ Kavusa, “Ecological Hermeneutics,” 237.

⁵⁵ Kavusa, “Ecological Hermeneutics,” 241. Kavusa does not call this ecojustice, though it appears to be akin to ecojustice.

⁵⁶ Kavusa, “Ecological Hermeneutics,” 245.

Testament scholar Sigve Tonstad's work is an exceptional example. He writes within the six ecojustice principles identified by Norman Habel and the Earth Bible Project. Kavusa identifies this approach as a hermeneutic of resistance.⁵⁷ Here are Habel's hermeneutic principles:

The principle of intrinsic worth: the universe, Earth and all its components have intrinsic worth/value.

The principle of interconnectedness: Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival.

The principle of voice: Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice.

The principle of purpose: the universe, Earth and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design.

The principle of mutual custodianship: Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners with, rather than rulers over, Earth to sustain its balance and a diverse Earth community.

The principle of resistance: Earth and its components not only suffer from human injustices but actively resist them in the struggle for justice.⁵⁸

These principles do not stand alone but are part of a "radical" tripartite ecological approach to the text, namely a "hermeneutic of suspicion, identification, and retrieval."⁵⁹ The movements around "suspicion" decenter anthropocentric readings of text and move them toward an "anthropotopic" reading so as to combat the dualism that characterizes the separation of humans from environment.⁶⁰ "Identification" is about "empathy" or "solidarity with Earth" and "to

⁵⁷ Kavusa, "Ecological Hermeneutics," 242.

⁵⁸ Norman Habel, "Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 46, no. 2 (August 2012): 97.

⁵⁹ Habel, "Ecological Hermeneutics," 101.

⁶⁰ Habel, "Ecological Hermeneutics," 101.

identify with non-human figures in the (biblical) narrative.”⁶¹ Lastly, “retrieval” takes seriously the “non-human characters in the story,”⁶² whereby we “hear Earth as the narrator of the story.”⁶³

Tina Dykesteen Nilsen and Anna Rebecca Solvåg push beyond Habel, giving preference to the Earth Charter, a sort of “soft law document,” as “an alternative ethical framework for ecological biblical interpretation.”⁶⁴ The appeal is integrative. The Earth Charter document ... (has) four pillars: Respect and Care for the Community of Life, Ecological Integrity, Social and Economic Justice, and Democracy, Nonviolence and Peace.”⁶⁵

Nilsen and Solvåg also build on Elaine M. Wainwright, who proposes an “ecofeminist, postcolonial”⁶⁶ hermeneutic. Cleverly, they coin the term “ecocolonial” to describe the integration of the colonial setting, connectivity, and the location where culture meets the Bible.⁶⁷ This is an approach that will surface on page 47 as part of the literature reviewed. Kendra Haloviak Valentine employs a similar logic in “Reading the Bible With Green Eyes,”⁶⁸ representing an integrative hermeneutical approach that the reader will find reflected in this dissertation.

⁶¹ Habel, “Ecological Hermeneutics,” 102, 3.

⁶² Habel, “Ecological Hermeneutics,” 104.

⁶³ Habel, “Ecological Hermeneutics,” 104.

⁶⁴ Nilsen and Solgevåg, “Expanding Ecological Hermeneutics,” 673, 4.

⁶⁵ “About Us: What Is the Earth Charter Document?,” Earth Charter, 2020, <https://earthcharter.org/about-the-earth-charter/>.

⁶⁶ Tina Dykesteen Nilsen and Anna Rebecca Solgevåg, “Expanding Ecological Hermeneutics: The Case for Ecocolonialism,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135, no. 4 (2016): 670, <http://dx.doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1354.2016.3111>.

⁶⁷ Nilsen and Solgevåg, “Expanding Ecological Hermeneutics,” 675.

⁶⁸ Kendra Haloviak Valentine, “Reading the Bible With Green Eyes,” *Spectrum: The Journal of the Association of Adventist Forums* 46, no. 4 (2018): 47–50.

Summary

This dissertation is written with the author's awareness of self, including Whiteness, social positionality, and inherent biases. The dissertation explores research questions dealing with theology(ies), power structures and dynamics, and pedagogies that bypass or disrupt, in the context of naming this awareness and defining situated and representational language around personal religious affiliation and religious group identity. Such work is unique in the Adventist context. Extant research reveals the lack of a fully developed Adventist ecotheology, even though excellent and thoughtful work has been done in this area. The hermeneutical frame of this dissertation includes food, which serves as a lens with which to look at ecological issues and as a pedagogical tool for exploring ecotheology in a small group process (the TSGPP). It relies primarily on readings of resistance while incorporating readings of recovery and as revision. Ecojustice, feminism, and postcolonialism stand as hermeneutical/interpretive tools. Those interpretive moves beyond "readings of recovery" are highlighted for their potential to move Adventism to a more ecologically engaged space.

Chapter 2: Adventist Ecotheologies: A Literature Review

The Context of Adventist Interest in Ecology and Ecotheology

A quick survey of historic and present-day Adventist evangelistic pamphlets reveals an apocalyptic focus. Draught, famine, earthquakes, wars, the threat of nuclear annihilation, communism, spiritualism—these will inaugurate Earth’s final chapter. More recently, radical Islam and the rising threats of global warming and ecological disaster have been heralded as harbingers of the impending end. Ecological failure is a new and relevant way to understand a dying world, and with that, the soon and necessary return of Christ who brings about the cleansing destruction and re-creation of the world that accompany the traditional understandings of the *eschaton*. As Greg Garrard puts it, “Environmental crisis serves modern conservative evangelists just as natural disasters served mediaeval millenarians: as a sign of the coming End, but not as a warning to avert it.”⁶⁹

Garrard’s observation is certainly applicable. For example, Adventist layman Scott Christiansen does not appear to want to move people to action through his work, other than the action necessary to be ready for the crises to come. His blogs⁷⁰ expand on his 2012 book,⁷¹ which connects “the effect of sin on the physical world, the degradation of an array of natural systems that underpin life on this planet[,] ... and the fulfillment of prophecy,” as well as “the degradation of three global systems created by man (oil, finance, world-wide complex society)

⁶⁹ Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, New Critical Idiom (New York: Routledge, 2012), 97, as cited by Linnea Helgesen, “Ecocritical Bible Reading,” *Spectrum Conversation* (blog), April 19, 2019, <https://conversation.spectrummagazine.org/t/ecocritical-bible-reading/18219>.

⁷⁰ Scott Christiansen, “About This Blog,” *Planet in Distress*, n.d., <https://planetindistress.com/about/>.

⁷¹ Scott Christiansen, *Planet in Distress: Environmental Deterioration and the Great Controversy* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald Publishing, 2012).

and the myriad ways in which these man-made global systems interact with (and potentiate the decline of) natural global systems.”⁷²

Christiansen's use of the “great controversy” theme draws from ideas familiar to Seventh-day Adventists, namely co-founder and prophetess Ellen G. White's theodicy and the arc of time she outlines from creation to the making of Earth anew and eternal life with God. The historical, prophetic and apocalyptic tend toward anticipation of the eschaton, but hardly represent the full scope of the concerns represented in her writings, including those on nature.

Warren C. Trenchard, Professor of New Testament and Early Christian Literature understands Ellen G. White's thoughts to include nature as “important largely for educational and restorative values,”⁷³ the “generic” idea of “unity of man with nature,”⁷⁴ stewardship,⁷⁵ and the abuse and suffering of animals.⁷⁶ E.G. White wrote extensively on these themes. She also wrote on animal husbandry, farming, gardening, and the correlated benefits to human character embedded in being connected to the land.⁷⁷ She promoted combining education of the mind with manual physical labor in husbandry or agriculture for the then-emergent Adventist schools.

⁷² Christiansen, “About This Blog,” <https://planetindistress.com/about/>.

⁷³ Warren C. Trenchard, “For the Beauty of the Earth: An Adventist Theology of Ecology,” *Spectrum* 31:3 (Summer 2003): 34. This is an early and exceptionally thoughtful, if incomplete, Adventist ecotheology.

⁷⁴ Trenchard, “For the Beauty of the Earth,” 35.

⁷⁵ Trenchard, “For the Beauty of the Earth,” 35.

⁷⁶ Trenchard, “For the Beauty of the Earth,” 35.

⁷⁷ Several new compilations of White's writings have recently been put on the market, mostly by independent ministries outside of the management of the White Estate. Ellen G. White, *Greenprint: God's Plan for Cultivating Land and People*, comps. David Obermiller and Diana Santos (U.S.A: David Obermiller, 2015); Ellen G. White, *Hope in the Soil: A Topical Complication of the Writings of Ellen G. White on Agriculture, Farming, and Gardening*, comp. Cari Haus (San Bernardino, CA: Cari Haus, 2015); and Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Agriculture*, comp. John Dysinger (Calhoun, GA: TEACH Services, Inc., 2016) Written not so much for the sake of ecology or as ecotheology as an appeal to God's plan for our survival in the last days, these compilations highlight White's work in these areas.

Influential nineteenth-century contemporaries of E. G. White also saw nature as a worthy subject. In the poem *The Tables Turned*, William Wordsworth wrote “Come forth into the light of things, Let nature be your teacher.”⁷⁸ Henry David Thoreau, author of *Walden Pond*, expressed profound appreciation for nature and concern at its disappearance. John Muir did much to shape awareness of the need to preserve vast areas of wilderness in as pristine a condition as possible, which ultimately gave rise to the National Parks system.

Ellen G. White also saw nature as a teacher. She wrote, “Upon all created things is seen the impress of the Deity. Nature testifies of God. The susceptible mind, brought in contact with the miracle and mystery of the universe, cannot but recognize the working of infinite power.”⁷⁹ Might Ellen White’s romantic idealization of nature reflect this nineteenth century romantic milieu ways not dissimilar from the writings of these poets? Seen through White’s Wesleyan theological background and sensibilities,⁸⁰ biblical understandings, and cultural connection with Romantic poets in the age of industrialization, much could be said about how she shaped the historic Adventist understanding of nature and the mandate for creation care.

Historical Shifts

When Ellen G. White died in 1915, major and historic shifts were reshaping the world in ways previously inconceivable. The Romantic era had long ended, though aesthetics as a prime

⁷⁸ William Wordsworth, *The Tables Turned*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45557/the-tables-turned>, accessed February 1, 2020.

⁷⁹ Ellen G. White, “God in Nature,” Chapter 10, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1903), 99.

⁸⁰ Mick Pope, “With Heads Craning Forward; The Eschaton and Nonhuman Creation in Romans 8,” in *Ecotheology in the Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding the Divine and Nature*, Ecocritical Theory and Practice (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017), 162. Here, Pope explores Wesleyan views of nature and the exegetical flaws that impact his understanding of what the restoration to glory might look like. These views influenced Ellen G. White’s perspectives on nonhuman creation.

consideration in assessing the value of nature remained engrained in Adventist considerations of nature. Realism and Modernism followed Romanticism, giving rise to change affecting virtually every facet of American life.

In 1915, World War I was already underway. The economic collapse following the stock market crash of 1929 led to the Great Depression of the 1930s. World War II began in 1939. The population boom that followed in the United States brought historically high levels of income equality and unprecedented economic growth. More people went to college. More infrastructure was developed around the automobile. Demand for fossil fuels increased. Agriculture shifted, and the mass use of genetically altered seeds, pesticides, and herbicides, along with the global export of foods created new challenges. Water sourcing, use, and contamination; soil erosion; and air pollution all became major issues. In a world that was radically different from what it had been in 1915, the Adventist Church grew dramatically into a global entity, increasingly institutional and largely detached from environmental concerns.⁸¹

In the United States, a major environmental wake-up call came with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), which decried the indiscriminate use of pesticides, particularly DDT, and the misinformation campaigns run by chemical companies about product benefits.⁸² Philosophers like Arne Næss, who coined the term "deep ecology" in the early 1970s, worked to raise awareness that non-human life had value and was worth preserving apart from utility to humans.

⁸¹ Jonathan Butler's short 1970 article in *Insight*, "Pity the Plant, All Joy Gone," (alluding to the Robert Lowell poem) may be the earliest Adventist publication on the topic. As *Insight* was the General Conference publication intended for the youth market, Butler may stand as Adventism's first responder. See Trenchard, "For the Beauty of the Earth," 35.

⁸² Eliza Griswold, "How 'Silent Spring' Ignited the Environmental Movement," *The New York Times Magazine*, September 21, 2012, <https://nyti.ms.P3yGKz>.

He was concerned with biodiversity and suggested that population control and simple living might be means to preserving what was left.

Myriad environmental organizations and movements sprang up between 1962 and 1975. Despite these early environmental movements, development has continued unchecked; the world's population has more than doubled⁸³; energy use has gone up exponentially; and degradation of the land and seas has inspired new generations of those bringing awareness and suggesting possibilities. Al Gore, Bill McKibben, and more recently Greta Thunberg (to name but a few) prophetically and passionately call us to care for the Earth. But there is opposition.

In the U.S., the inexplicable withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement in mid-2017, accelerated deregulation, and the opening of new pipelines for tar sands and oil continue to heat up an economy that is absolutely not sustainable. Though anthropogenic global warming has been contested politically in the U.S., it is now nearly universally acknowledged as scientific fact. Ecology is a relevant and urgent topic of global interest in the sciences, humanities, and industry. The crisis is both worsening and widening. Current conversations in Adventism exist in great part because the environmental crisis is a global concern, and the evidence is getting more and more difficult to ignore.

Current conversations also exist because dietary practices, human health, and longevity are inextricably entwined with the environment. Diets affect food sourcing, production, transport, consumption, and disposal. Health is resource-efficient and depends upon qualitative environmental factors, too. Longevity has implications for population growth and creates long-

⁸³ Max Roser, Hannah Ritchie and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, "World Population Growth," last modified May 2019, *Our World In Data*, <https://ourworldindata.org/world-population-growth>.

term demands that increase as people live longer. These are but a few factors giving rise to a growing interest in the Adventist Church in ecology, ecotheology, and ecojustice.

Lynn White, Jr.'s 1967 seminal article, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," which appeared in the journal *Science*, jolted the Christian world and continues to be both commonly and continually referenced, particularly by Evangelical apologists. This includes Adventists, who were implicated in the claims White, Jr. made: that the biblical notion of human dominion, combined with a rejection of animism and a sharp differentiation between humans as made in God's image and the rest of creation as a whole led to what amounts to a utilitarian and exploitive relationship to the natural world.⁸⁴ White, Jr. challenged Christians to look anew at their traditions, noting: "the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be religious, whether we call it that or not."⁸⁵ Adventists are still trying to answer White, Jr. today, whether they agree or disagree with his arguments—and they mostly disagree.

Official Statements of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC) has not been officially silent. Four separate and oft-cited statements on the environment have been released, all published between 1992 and 1996 during the General Conference presidency of Robert S. Folkenberg. These statements are grounded in creation, Sabbath, stewardship of creation, and the principles of respect and cooperation, while noting sinful humankind's role in environmental destruction and global warming. The 1992 statement captures the ethos of these four short statements:

Because we recognize humans as part of God's creation, our concern for the environment extends to personal health and lifestyle. We advocate a wholesome

⁸⁴ Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967): 2303-1207.

⁸⁵ White, Jr., "Historical Roots," 1207.

manner of living and reject the use of substances such as tobacco,⁸⁶ alcohol, and other drugs that harm the body and consume earth's resources; and we promote a simple vegetarian diet.⁸⁷

The 1996 statement frames it similarly, adding a note about the perils of over-consumption:

Seventh-day Adventism advocates a simple, wholesome lifestyle, where people do not step on the treadmill of unbridled over-consumption, accumulation of goods, and production of waste. A reformation of lifestyle is called for, based on respect for nature, restraint in the use of the world's resources, reevaluation of one's needs, and reaffirmation of the dignity of created life.⁸⁸

These two samples offer economic directions vis-à-vis simplicity; environmental and animal rights protections through vegetarianism; resource utilization minimization through healthy living, and an ethos of concern for nature.⁸⁹ Adventists doing all these make a difference.

The GC statement on global warming is surprising for its contemporary relevance and urgency, as was its call to follow the 1996 Rio de Janeiro Convention on Climate Change.⁹⁰ Although published almost 24 years ago, it also remains the most recent statement on the environmental crisis. But there's a back story.

⁸⁶ Interestingly, cigarettes are a significant environmental issue as most of the filters have small plastic components that end up polluting streams and clogging our oceans. See Kevin Loria, "How to Eat Less Plastic," *Consumer Reports*, accessed August 27, 2019, <https://www.consumerreports.org/food/how-to-eat-less-plastic-microplastics-in-food-water/>.

⁸⁷ Seventh-day Adventist Church Official Statement, "Caring for Creation: A Statement on the Environment" (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee, October 12, 1992), <https://www.adventist.org/articles/caring-for-the-environment/>.

⁸⁸ Seventh-day Adventist Church Official Statement, "A Statement on Stewardship of the Environment" (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee., October 1, 1996), <https://www.adventist.org/articles/stewardship-of-the-environment/>.

⁸⁹ For a more in-depth review of these, see Abdi and Pardamean, "Christianity and Ecology," 277-8.

⁹⁰ Seventh-day Adventist Church Official Statement, "The Dangers of Climate Change" (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee, December 19, 1995), <https://www.adventist.org/articles/the-dangers-of-climate-change/>.

During the late 1980s, then-GC-President Neal C. Wilson's administration was working on the precursor to what became the 1996 statement referenced above. Wilson focused on a broad range of social issues, including assault weapons, pornography, the importance of family, homelessness and poverty, environmental stewardship, aids, and drug use/abuse/dependency.⁹¹ Published in the August 2, 1990 issue of the *Review* as part of the report of the 1990 GC Session, these proposed position statements were never discussed or voted on during the Session, though the *Review* claimed they "fairly represent the position of the church."⁹²

Virtually unknown and virtually never cited in current scholarship, a section of the 1990 article by Wilson just referenced, "Stewardship of the Environment," (see Appendix A) would morph into the oft-cited 1996 document of the same title, which was officially voted and published by the Administrative Committee of the General Conference in anticipation of Annual Council.⁹³ Wilson's 1990 version is unequivocal, confessional in tone. Printed admissions were made: humans have wreaked havoc on the environment, imperiling future generations and perpetuating moral harms to the environment and persons living in "less-advantaged areas" of the world.⁹⁴ Wilson did not let up on his critique: "In our greed for more, we have wantonly exploited the earth as though its bounties were inexhaustible. We have in the process created hazardous products that defy safe disposal. Using the ocean as a giant garbage dump, we have acted as if it were a bottomless pit capable of absorbing unlimited refuse and sewage."⁹⁵ Astonishing in its humility, depth, breadth, and concern, the document bears moral authority.

⁹¹ Neal C. Wilson, "GC Leaders Target Concerns for the Adventist Church," *Adventist Review* (August 26, 1990): 10-12, <https://adventistdigitallibrary.org/adl-355884/adventist-review-august-2-1990>.

⁹² Wilson, "Target Concerns," 10.

⁹³ Seventh-day Adventist Church Official Statement, "Stewardship of the Environment."

⁹⁴ Wilson, "Target Concerns," 11.

⁹⁵ Wilson, "Target Concerns," 11.

Bold in its call for industry and all levels of government to “enact such appropriate measures as would ensure the safety and well-being of an environment on the brink of catastrophe,”⁹⁶ it voiced a prophetic call.

What was bold appeared to fold. Folkenberg’s administration, which followed Wilson’s, was more Evangelical and conservative (in relationship to Fundamentalist concerns and politics). Wilson was a classic mainline Adventist. This shift finds reflection in the equivocation in the 1996 document’s qualifying statement, “(w)hile scientific research needs to continue,” indicating a shift from the surety of anthropogenic environmental disaster to a tacit accommodation for emergent climate change deniers. A bland commendation of the “government and people of Costa Rica ... for their support of a comprehensive policy of sustainable development in harmony with nature”⁹⁷ stands in for the prophetic dialectic of the earlier Wilson statement and signals a radical shift.

What happened? The issues discussed and voted on the floor of the 1990 GC Session, also printed in the August 2, 1990 issue of the *Review*, reveal a profound shift. On page 13, the “Feature” article discussed the Session debate around “Women’s Issues,”⁹⁸ specifically the vote of 1173 to 377 “not to authorize ordination for women pastors.”⁹⁹ This vote remains the most remembered aspect of the 1990 GC Session. Despite the vote against ordination, the *Church Manual* was amended by a vote of 776 to 494 to allow “qualified licensed and commissioned ministers to perform marriages”¹⁰⁰ allowing for women to perform almost all the functions their

⁹⁶ Wilson, “Target Concerns,” 11.

⁹⁷ Seventh-day Adventist Church Official Statement, “Stewardship of the Environment.”

⁹⁸ Carlos Medley, “Women’s Issues Spark Debate,” *Adventist Review* 167, no. 36 (August 2, 1990): 13.

⁹⁹ Medley, “Women’s Issues,” 13.

¹⁰⁰ Medley, “Women’s Issues,” 13.

counterparts could. In the pages leading up to this “Feature”, a “Resolution on Spirit of Prophecy” was also discussed and voted, as was a revision to the *Church Manual* on “The Communion Service.”

While the ecological issues Wilson highlighted have become far more complex and urgent, the church turned to more Evangelical concerns, such as the ordination of women, creation,¹⁰¹ homosexuality, same-sex marriage, transgenderism, and abortion. These issues are not just Evangelical mainstays but are at the heart of the question of the larger systems of oppression feminist and postcolonial studies name that factor in the dominance and oppression of nature as well.

Adventist Women and Ecotheology

Most Adventist scholarship emerged in the context of the shifts, developments, and challenges noted previously. In this section, the voices of women in academia, ministry and church have been given priority not only as a means to counter gender imbalance, but because there is so much excellent extant work by women in various fields. Male voices from the Global South and from Australian, European, and North American contexts will feature later.

In 1992, Educational Philosopher Iris Yob suggested the “disparateness of feminine and masculine” might be a useful lens for understanding the divine, particularly as “women have not been part of the discourse in theology, politics, economics, philosophy, the arts, and so on—and

¹⁰¹ There continues to be a great deal of energy spent on demonstrating the literal truth of a young earth (approximately 6,000 years old) created in seven literal days. This is a problem for Adventists and Evangelicals alike—for how can we care so much about the Creator who created and when and how creation came to be, and so little about creation? Lockton voices this basic concern: the elevation of the propositional over the ethical. See Harwood A. Lockton, “The Neglected Message of the Creation Story,” *Ministry Magazine* 64, no. 9 (September 1991): 9–11.

[...] their exclusion has been systematic.”¹⁰² This note may be Yob’s prescient nod at emergent themes in ecofeminism, which Rosemary Radford Ruether defined as an “examination of “the interconnections between the domination of women and the domination of nature.”¹⁰³

Pastor Sheryll Prinz-McMillan was an early Adventist responder to ecofeminism, particularly to Ruether's then-recent and oft-cited work, *Gaia and God*.¹⁰⁴ McMillan's presentation to the Adventist Society for Religious Studies in November of 1993 was published by *Spectrum* magazine as an article in 1994. *Adventist Today* also adapted the presentation into an article in the same year.

Prinz-McMillan’s analysis centered on the premise that reality is not best described by the split between material and spiritual realities and that created material existence is good. God is not only transcendent, but also immanent and present to creation through breath (Hebrew *ruach*). Wholeness (which I read as unity of God and all creation); vegetarianism as a valuation of life and respect for creatureliness (and more radically, as “a method of reconciliation to creation and a return to the original relationship to creatures of the earth”¹⁰⁵); and Sabbath as a “call to nature”¹⁰⁶ are all partially embedded Adventist ideals already. Importantly, Prinz-McMillan engages Ruether’s observation of apocalypticism as a form of “escapism” and points instead to an inclusively redemptive eschatology that challenges Adventists to a relationship with both God and the world.

¹⁰² Iris M. Yob, “Male and Female: Balancing Their Roles in the Church,” *Ministry Magazine* (March 1992): 12.

¹⁰³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Ecofeminism - The Challenge to Theology,” *Deportate, Esuli, Profughe (DEP)* n. 20 (2012): 22.

¹⁰⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether would likely have been working at that time on her books *Gaia and God*, 1992. and *Sexism and God-Talk*, published in 1993.

¹⁰⁵ Sheryll Prinz-McMillan, “Feminists, Ecology, And the Sabbath,” *Spectrum: The Journal of the Association of Adventist Forums* 34, no. 5 (April 1994): 17.

¹⁰⁶ Prinz-McMillan, “Feminists, Ecology, And the Sabbath,” 16.

The ongoing question of gender equality in the Adventist Church symbolically rendered vis-à-vis the question of ordination of women to gospel ministry continues to be a major issue.¹⁰⁷ Before the 1990 Indianapolis General Conference Session voted not to approve such a step and the 1995 Utrecht General Conference Session denied the North American Division independence to do so.¹⁰⁸ Even so, despite the General Conference votes,¹⁰⁹ Sheryll Prinz-McMillan became the fifth Adventist woman¹¹⁰ ordained to gospel ministry on December 2, 1995. Per feminist eco-philosophies and theologies, the suppression of women as represented in the denial of ordination connects to the larger question of suppression in relationship to Earth as environment.

This connection was made even clearer in a ground-breaking (if sparsely attended¹¹¹) Young Women and The Word Conference entitled “Adventist Women & The Earth: A Response to Ecofeminism” took place at La Sierra University Church in Riverside, CA April 24-26, 2009.¹¹² Organized by Heide Ford, then-director of the Women's Resource Center at La Sierra

¹⁰⁷ Debates over this issue go back as far as the early 1900s with the move toward fundamentalism. For a more complete account, see Michael Campbell, *1919: The Untold Story of Adventism's Struggle with Fundamentalism* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2019).

¹⁰⁸ Alberto R. Timm, “Seventh-Day Adventists on Women’s Ordination: A Brief Historical Overview,” Theology of Ordination Study Committee (Columbia, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, January 21, 2014), 18.
<https://www.adventistarchives.org/seventh-day-adventists-on-womens-ordination-a-brief-historical-overview.pdf>

¹⁰⁹ Timm, “Women’s Ordination: Historical Overview,” 18.

¹¹⁰ Sixth if you accept that E. G. White's ordination certificate is a valid representation of her status.

¹¹¹ Conference notes written by a classmate of Jared Wright indicate only 150 or so were in attendance. See Jared Wright, “Earth, Wind, Fire, Water...Women,” *Adventistforum.Org/Node/1610* (blog), April 30, 2009.
<https://spectrummagazine.org/article/jared-wright/2009/04/30/earth-wind-fire-waterwomen-part-one>.

¹¹² Young Women and The Word Conference, “Adventist Women and the Earth,” <https://adventistwomenearth.wordpress.com/> (accessed Fall, 2019). This website offers the original program, a helpful bibliography of “Adventist Writings on Ecology,” and an ecofeminist book list, among other things.

University (LSU), the conference intended “to better understand the intersection between ecology, religion, and gender” and “to explore connections with gender justice, and to examine religious beliefs as they underpin individual and collective stewardship.”¹¹³ Internationally known luminaries John Cobb, Jr. and Rosemary Radford Ruether attended. Radford Ruether served as the keynote speaker, empaneled alongside LSU School of Religion faculty Ginger Hanks Harwood (Associate Professor of Religious and Theological Studies) and Warren Trenchard (Professor of New Testament and Early Christian Literature), and Pastor Sheryll Prinz-McMillan. In context, ecofeminism served as an important way for the conference to address the question of the environment.

Writing outside the hermeneutical considerations of ecofeminism, Jo Ann Davidson, Professor of Systematic Theology at Andrews University, does work in the vein of what might be termed “biblical ecology.” To the extent her work brings “ecology to theology,” it represents Adventist ecotheology.¹¹⁴

Davidson draws upon a deep grounding in biblical text and the writings of Ellen G. White, effortlessly moving the reader through the abundance of compelling biblical textual evidence for God’s love of creation and creation care. She brilliantly illuminates the ecological passages found in the Hebrew Bible, from the embedded goodness of creation itself to the inclusivity of the land and animal ethical codes within the Torah; from the connectedness and shared qualities of creatures imbued with the “breath of life” (Genesis 1:20) to the preservation of species in the ark; from Job’s dialogue with God and the prosaic hymnody and the poetry of

¹¹³ Young Women and The Word Conference, “About” page, “Adventist Women and the Earth,” <https://adventistwomenearth.wordpress.com/about/> (accessed Fall, 2019).

¹¹⁴ Jo Ann Davidson, “Creator, Creation, and Church: Restoring Ecology to Theology,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 45, no. 1 (2007): 101.

the Psalms to, finally, the prophetic injunctions of the prophet Isaiah on through to Hosea and Jonah. Surveyed, too, are texts quoting Jesus, penned by Paul, and those that capture the visions of John right through the apocalypse. All of these texts bear witness that, as Davidson writes, “all the created world is part of God's concern, animals right along with human beings.”¹¹⁵ Her ecotheology identifies what she terms “a robust doctrine of life,”¹¹⁶ a compelling and expansive vision for the project.

Among her early works, and arising from a paper presented to the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) in 2002, Davidson adds food to her ecotheology by surveying world religions and faith traditions in terms of religious concerns around diet.¹¹⁷ Her paper later appeared in the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society (JATS)*, which is significant because the organization for which this journal publishes is essentially an Adventist version of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (JETS)*. While her conclusion mentions Judeo-Christian holism around “ethical, ecological, eschatological and spiritual issues,”¹¹⁸ what she means by “ecological” is not defined elsewhere in the paper.

Davidson's ecotheology is biblical, but the philosophical and hermeneutical lenses are not obvious. In what I would consider her quintessential ecotheology, she avoids ecophilosophy as a tool with which to ground her subjects (non-human and inanimate creation) and turns instead to environmental ethics. Noting the anthropocentrism of Western ethics, she offers a critique as to

¹¹⁵ Jo Ann Davidson, “Seventh-Day Adventists and Ecology,” in *The Word of God For The People of God: A Tribute To The Ministry Of Jack J. Blanco*, ed. Ron du Preez, Philip G. Samaan, and Ron E. M. Clouzet (Berrien Springs, MI: School of Religion, Southern Adventist University, 2006), 369.

¹¹⁶ Jo Ann Davidson, “Christians and Creation Care,” *Lake Union Herald* (November/December 2014), 14.

¹¹⁷ Jo Ann Davidson, “World Religions and the Vegetarian Diet,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14, no. 2 (2003): 114-130.

¹¹⁸ Davidson, “World Religions and the Vegetarian Diet,” 130.

the adequacy of such systems in terms of the predominance of “good consequences over harmful ones.”¹¹⁹

In a rather recent anthology for which Davidson writes the opening chapter,¹²⁰ she hints at her ethical *and* philosophical concerns, noting that “we need to expand our moral horizon and our notion of justice and stewardship.”¹²¹ As a systematic theologian, Davidson appears to rely on theories of ontology and justice to make the case for her biblical ecology of creation care¹²² and uses land and animal ethics to frame her concerns in terms of the more encompassing notion of stewardship. Davidson defines stewardship as relational, rather than the unbridled dominion claimed by so many Christians through the Genesis 1: 26 text.

Davidson and I agree, Adventists “do not properly value creation ... as more than just a dispensable stage awaiting demolition at the end of the Great Controversy.”¹²³ Herein, of course, she speaks directly to the negative question affirming ecological apathy in light of the second coming of Jesus. In this her eschatology is grounded and situated. She notes the “resplendent restoration” foretold by the prophets. She emphasizes redemption via *renewal*. Earth is not abandoned, but reclaimed,¹²⁴ allowing for a much less anthropocentric “earth-affirming” soteriology.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ Davidson, “Restoring Ecology to Theology,” 101.

¹²⁰ Jo Ann Davidson, “How Does God Regard His Creation?,” in *Entrusted: Christians and Environmental Care* ed. Steve Dunbar, L. James Gibson, and Humberto M. Rasi (Mexico: Adventus International University Publishers, 2013), 1–286.

¹²¹ Davidson, “How Does God Regard His Creation?,” 11.

¹²² Davidson favors the language of “creation care.” This language, as I see it, is descriptive without carrying baggage, and it can speak to any politic, system, religion, or mythology outside realm of Evangelical biblicism.

¹²³ Davidson, “How Does God Regard His Creation?,” 11.

¹²⁴ Davidson, “Adventists and Ecology,” 371.

¹²⁵ Davidson, “Adventists and Ecology,” 371.

Davidson's eschatological vision is the end of violence. Conventionally Adventist in her understanding that meatless living is a way to prepare for life post-eschaton, she employs a refocused ethic of love—love for live animals, not meat; an Edenic diet signals a new era in which killing will cease.¹²⁶

Her confessional conclusions in her chapter "Seventh-day Adventists and Ecology"¹²⁷ state that Adventists are "often negligent to link ecology with our theology"¹²⁸ and that "authentic Christian faith must include ecological concerns."¹²⁹ Through diet, "Adventists could be at the forefront of ecological concerns."¹³⁰ There's a lot of power and truth to these words.

How does this play out practically in Davidson's work? Recycle, compost, and *forego eating meat* (italics mine). While Davidson is not one to quote a lot of scientific studies or environmental statistics, she does not fail to note the significant inefficiencies of feeding cattle grain, the enormous costs in water use in doing so, and the contamination of ground water from cattle sewage seepage.¹³¹

Davidson cites historic quotations from Ellen G. White on the mental and intellectual benefits of avoiding flesh foods, as well as the heightening of spiritual and moral sensibilities (all based on what I have termed the "fuel for sacred bodies" motif); she layers onto these "due attention to the crucial ecological issues involved with eating meat."¹³² She seamlessly blends the idea of food around ideas of stewardship along with Adventist holism, suggesting a vegetarian

¹²⁶ Davidson, "Adventists and Ecology," 377.

¹²⁷ Jo Ann Davidson, "Seventh-Day Adventists and Ecology," in *The Word of God for The People of God: A Tribute to The Ministry of Jack J. Blanco* (Berrien Springs, MI: School of Religion, Southern Adventist University, 2006), 359–78.

¹²⁸ Davidson, "Seventh-Day Adventists and Ecology," 359.

¹²⁹ Davidson, "Seventh-Day Adventists and Ecology," 371.

¹³⁰ Davidson, "Seventh-Day Adventists and Ecology," 378.

¹³¹ Davidson, "Seventh-Day Adventists and Ecology," 376.

¹³² Davidson, "Seventh-Day Adventists and Ecology," 375.

diet for reasons of justice and environmental sustainability, not just personal physical health or longevity.¹³³

Women scholars in the humanities writing on ecology integrating perspectives in a cross-disciplinary way. La Sierra University (LSU) Department of English Chair Melissa J. Brotton emerges as one of the most important Adventist woman scholars working around issues of ecojustice and ecotheology today.¹³⁴ While not a theologian, her work nevertheless assembles diverse voices from across the humanities to look at the ecological challenge from a Christian perspective. The two recent volumes Brotton has edited are published by Rowman and Littlefield and endorsed by or contributed to by legends John Cobb, Jr., Robert R. Gottfried, and Celia Deane-Drummond.¹³⁵

Brotton represents a less sectarian brand of thinking, made possible perhaps by writing not as a theologian, but as a humanities-based scholar.¹³⁶ Her stated goals are to “draw attention to the number of disciplines outside of religious studies that are making interpretive use of the language of eco-theology” and “to show what scholarship across the humanities can add to the

¹³³ M. Rizal Abdi and Ferry Goodman Pardamean, “Christianity and Ecology: A Critical Study on the Contribution of SDA Theology Toward Ecology,” *Jurnal Kawistara* 8, no. 3 (February 26, 2019): 80.

¹³⁴ I wish there were space in this brief section to engage Brotton’s perspective, as well as the very thoughtful work of New Testament scholar Kendra Haloviak Valentine, who writes and co-writes two chapters in these volumes edited by Brotton. I’ve selected Ginger Hanks Harwood’s work for purposes of engagement here partly because she’s quoted by non-Adventist scholars writing on Sabbath as an ecological practice (Laura Hartman) and others.

¹³⁵ Adventist endorsements include NT scholar Sigve K. Tonstad and theologian Ginger Hanks Harwood.

¹³⁶ The scope of this dissertation does not allow me to engage all of Brotton’s contributors, though I’ve read and taken notes on many of them! She writes a compelling Introduction, and New Testament Scholar Kendra Haloviak Valentine writes two chapters her volume on “nonhuman ethics.” I have chosen to include Harwood’s chapter as it relates well to the work of Sigve Tonstad.

language of eco-theology.”¹³⁷ She employs literary hermeneutical tools, and her work transcends “readings of recovery” while featuring contributors who approach biblical textual references in a variety of ways.

A colleague of Brotton’s, Lori Geriguis serves as Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and Professor of English at LSU. Geriguis suggests “environmental enthusiasm” as the key to understanding the ethos of a recent *Spectrum* magazine focused on ecological and related issues, written from a “diverse range of disciplines including Biblical studies, English literature, American history, and psychology.”¹³⁸ One could read her idea of “enthusiasm” as simplistic. I see her clearly outlined, succinctly named point of view as related to E.O. Wilson’s well-known biophilia hypothesis, an idea laden with desire and connection.¹³⁹ As so many ecologists understand, environmental enthusiasm starts with a connection to nature—it is grounded in love.

LSU Professor of New Testament Kendra Haloviak Valentine and former LSU Professor of Religious and Theological Studies, Ginger Hanks Harwood are both contributors to Brotton’s *Ecotheology And Nonhuman Ethics in Society*. Examining Mark’s gospel with an ecocritical eye, Haloviak Valentine notices the role of nature, the land and its features, and the animals, particularly the story of the 2,000 pigs in Mark 5. Both her chapter in Brotton¹⁴⁰ and her shorter

¹³⁷ Melissa J. Brotton, “‘Heaven and Nature Sing’: Introduction to Ecotheology in the Humanities,” in *Ecotheology in the Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding the Divine and Nature*, ed. Melissa J. Brotton (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2016), xv.

¹³⁸ Lora E. Geriguis, “Environmental Enthusiasm: An Introduction,” *Spectrum* 46, no. 4 (2018): 30.

¹³⁹ Edward O. Wilson, *Biophilia* (Harvard University Press, 1984).

¹⁴⁰ Kendra Haloviak Valentine, “Liberating Legion: An Ecocritical, Postcolonial Reading of Mark 5:1-20,” in *Ecotheology and Nonhuman Ethics in Society: A Community of Compassion*, ed. Melissa J. Brotton (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 199–215.

work in *Spectrum* share the same conclusion: “From an ecocritical perspective, Mark 5:1–20 can be read as reimagining the land of Gerasa without pigs and without invading armies controlling the local economy and ecology.”¹⁴¹ In her *Spectrum* article, Haloviak Valentine helpfully references a gift she received, *The Green Bible*,¹⁴² and the “environmental lens” it offers as a means to “call into question our conventional presuppositions and our settled conclusions.”¹⁴³ This gentle way of moving Adventist readers towards ecological hermeneutics deserves an affirming word.

Ginger Hanks Harwood’s chapter in Brotton’s *Ecotheology*¹⁴⁴ offers an answer to the challenge posed so long ago by Lynn White, Jr., answered through an ethic of friendship. She is careful to identify obstacles, namely anthropocentrism as relates to “dominion” and an eschatological soteriology that denies the importance of creation care. She sees the ecotheological task as “the re-examination of the way we have articulated our foundational biblical narratives and the resulting state of the earth, how we envision God and the difference that makes in our ethics, and what our theology has to say about the nature of the world and the role we have in it.”¹⁴⁵ Without naming hermeneutics as such, she seeks to understand how our

¹⁴¹ Haloviak Valentine, “With Green Eyes,” 50.

¹⁴² *The Green Bible NRSV* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2008).

¹⁴³ Haloviak Valentine, “With Green Eyes,” 50.

¹⁴⁴ It may be some of Harwood’s ideas around friendship developed out of conversation with Gary Chartier, who earned his PhD from the University of Cambridge with a dissertation on the idea of friendship under Nicholas Lash in 1991, and whose time at La Sierra University overlapped with Harwood’s.

¹⁴⁵ Ginger Hanks Harwood, “Friends of the Creator: A Theological Foundation for Earth-Keeping Christian Ethics,” in *Ecotheology in the Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding the Divine and Nature*, Ecocritical Theory and Practice (Lexington Books, 2016), 4-5.

cultural context and the history that gave rise to Western thought “predisposed us to hearing certain things while ignoring other significant textual themes.”¹⁴⁶

Her work features themes of human action and the politics that mobilize that human action in reference to climate change, preservation of biodiversity, and the rights of creatures. For Harwood, creation is at present managed for anthropocentric, utilitarian, and primarily economic purposes that require an examination of ethics and also “as a significant clue to the flaw within the way we regard God, humanity, and the larger creation.”¹⁴⁷

Harwood is not unique in connecting ecofeminism to this question, noting the larger metaphysical context of God as understood as “warrior king.”¹⁴⁸ Her exegetical turn leads to more promising and perhaps neglected mandates “to take care (*shamar*)”¹⁴⁹ of creation, the culminating of which is “Sabbath as *menuha*” or the goal toward which living things move.”¹⁵⁰

Harwood observes how the view of God shifts as God is understood as a friend to humanity and to the rest of creation.¹⁵¹ The Sabbath becomes pivotal in her ecotheology because the relationship between God and creation “established there on Sabbath is not based on coercive power and subjugation but is an invitation to communion, a *hesed*, a bond.”¹⁵² She continues, noting that “if we are to reflect God, human beings need also to be present as friends of

¹⁴⁶ Harwood, “Friends of the Creator,” 5.

¹⁴⁷ Harwood, “Friends of the Creator,” 7.

¹⁴⁸ Harwood, “Friends of the Creator,” 8.

¹⁴⁹ Harwood, “Friends of the Creator,” 11.

¹⁵⁰ Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 33, as cited by Harwood, Friends of the Creator, 11. Wirzba quotes Heschel. Laura Hartmann will also discuss “menuha” drawing from Heschel in her work. See Laura Hartman, “Christian Sabbath-Keeping as a Spiritual and Environmental Practice,” *Worldviews* 15 (2011): 51-52. See also Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1951), 22-23.

¹⁵¹ Harwood, “Friends of the Creator,” 12.

¹⁵² Harwood, “Friends of the Creator,” 12.

creation.”¹⁵³ Friendship with God becomes the basis for “accepting our vocation as earthkeepers”¹⁵⁴ and for “mobiliz[ing] our resources for its salvation instead of being passive in this time of ecological crisis.”¹⁵⁵ Hanks Harwood’s ultimate move connects Jesus’s question regarding whether he will “find any with faith” to her eco-eschatology. Will there be Christian Earth keepers? A prescient question, particularly in light of Revelation 11:18.

Laywomen and women teachers and pastors are writing on ecotheology. Norwegian teacher Linnea Helgesen writes an insightful exploratory “Spectrum Conversation” piece on ecocritical readings of scripture.¹⁵⁶ Reading through an ecocritical lens, she draws from Greg Garrard’s book *Ecocriticism* (2nd ed., 2012) and Tonstad’s *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* to deftly dispense with the idea that a fatalistic approach to the environment in light of the second coming is biblically or otherwise sound. For Helgesen, there is a clear connection between “faulty human decision-making and natural disasters.”¹⁵⁷ After reading about the Sabbath concepts of rest, jubilee, and the land, her observation is devastatingly clear and simple: the text “renders large-scale farming and exploitive agriculture impossible.” Her key observation is that “the Bible should not be used as an excuse to adopt culture that legitimizes exploitation of the natural world.”¹⁵⁸ Here it seems Helgesen is referring to religious and political culture.

¹⁵³ Harwood, “Friends of the Creator,” 12.

¹⁵⁴ Harwood, “Friends of the Creator,” 12.

¹⁵⁵ Harwood, “Friends of the Creator,” 18.

¹⁵⁶ Helgesen, “Ecocritical Bible Reading,” 6.

¹⁵⁷ Helgesen, “Ecocritical Bible Reading,” 2.

¹⁵⁸ Helgesen, “Ecocritical Bible Reading,” 5. This reflects her engagement with Tonstad’s critique of Lynn White, Jr., *Lost Meaning*, 395.

In 2014, Dita Aneta¹⁵⁹ wrote a slim, self-published volume on environmental stewardship.¹⁶⁰ She observed: 1) that Christian people do not seem to view the environment differently than others but exploit and consume it to make a living.¹⁶¹ 2) The Bible contextualizes the creation of humankind and situates it environmentally. 3) The environmental crisis is astutely framed in the language of Jeremiah 22:17, speaking of “oppression and violence.”¹⁶² 4) She renders the second coming of Christ (Luke 12) in terms of stewardship of creation, with judgment based on failure to steward, not in terms of the salvation of individual souls.¹⁶³ 5) She names the counterintuitive way in which “getting ahead” financially is based on extraction, not on preservation, and is not sustainable.¹⁶⁴ 6) She declares that animals cannot be “owned” and their care, alongside the land and nature itself, will bear testimony to a connection to God or to a lack thereof.¹⁶⁵ 7) Heaven is not for those who have used up the earth, but for “those who’ll be able to live in harmony with Him and all His creation.”¹⁶⁶ 8) Sabbath, properly observed, offers rest and restoration of relationships, and it helps us “reconnect with the natural world around us.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁵⁹ According to her book covers, Dita Aneta is Moravian Czech raised in the Hussite Church who chose to be an Adventist as a teenager. Her educational background is in library science and music and so represents a perspective outside the academic field of theology or ecotheology. As with many interested in this subject, she was raised to love and respect nature.

¹⁶⁰ Dita Aneta, *Environmental Steward: This Is My Father's World* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2014).

¹⁶¹ Aneta, *Environmental Steward*, ix, x.

¹⁶² Aneta, *Environmental Steward*, 22, 3.

¹⁶³ Aneta, *Environmental Steward*, 25, 6.

¹⁶⁴ Aneta, *Environmental Steward*, 27, 8. She does not use these terms.

¹⁶⁵ Aneta, *Environmental Steward*, 29-31.

¹⁶⁶ Aneta, *Environmental Steward*, 44.

¹⁶⁷ Aneta, *Environmental Steward*, 48.

Aneta has published two other slim books, one of which reflects interest in what amounts to a practical theology of both mortality and pets.¹⁶⁸ Here, she narratively grounds her thinking in experience and love. While occasionally anthropocentric, her understandings name the generative voice of God for whom animals are *nephesh*, and still *listen*, unlike most humans.¹⁶⁹ As there are no references or footnotes, no exegesis of the text, and no clear hermeneutic, I cannot say if she has read Ruether or Prinz-McMillan; nevertheless, if these works reflect her own thinking, they intuit themes affirmed by scholarship. There is optimism in recounting a gospel inclusive of all creation in God's victory over death. Her voice is worth hearing in Adventist circles: particularly for her clarity regarding salvation. Salvation is for *all* God's creation—not simply humankind.¹⁷⁰

Global Scholarship

Among the global voices represented here, most fall within the “readings of recovery” hermeneutic. Zimbabwe scholar Paul Mhlanga explores themes of Sabbath, imago Dei, stewardship, sin, reconciliation and redemption with redemption a topic of particular interest. Mhlanga quotes Angel Rodriguez:

The apocalyptic conflagration of the natural world is to be understood as an act of redemption which leads to the renewal of creation and not to its extinction. It is a transitional point from a world infected by sin and evil to one liberated from it. It is not the denial of nature but a re-affirmation of its goodness. The experience of nature can be contrasted with that of the wicked powers. They will be totally destroyed, extinguished from God's universe, without any possibility of a re-creation. They will be condemned as being essentially evil. Not so with the natural world. The final conflagration is its liberation.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Dita Aneta, *Pets Will Be in Heaven* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2013).

¹⁶⁹ Aneta, *Pets*, 24.

¹⁷⁰ Aneta, *Environmental Steward*, cover.

¹⁷¹ Angel Rodriguez, *Stewardship Roots: Toward a Theology of Stewardship, Tithe and Offerings*, ed. by Patricia Valentino (Silver Spring, MD: Department of Church Ministries, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1994), 23, quoted in Paul Mhlanga,

This view of redemption is key, in that rather than a total destruction and annihilation of Earth (the “natural world”), the natural world is *redeemed*. Sigve Tonstad will pick up this theme in his work, as we shall see.

Mhlanga’s voice is strongest in addressing the biblical basis of and practical consequences for a land ethic. This ethic places him firmly on the side of caring for the environment, with elements of a revisionist hermeneutic. He describes the land inhabited by spirits as holy ground that ought not to be disturbed out of respect for the ancestors and identifies positive ecological consequences that come out of this belief. This proves not to be an ecotheological tool; rather, Mhlanga rejects animism based upon adoption of a dominion model as revealed in the Bible, and, it appears, as exegeted within the colonial frame. Revelation is to be prioritized over other forms of religious knowing, and the adoption of an exploration and conquering ethic find voice, all while echoing traditional Christian concerns about idolatry.

John Odhiambo Otewa, a Kenyan Adventist educator and presenter at the 2001 International Seminar on the Integration of Faith and Learning, sees the ecological problem as a theological one. His argument suggests that God as Creator *and* Sustainer means humans may not have control over the environment for ill or good and that humans, as part of the “total environment,” became “naked of God's power” through sin.¹⁷² This sin (manifested by exploitation of nature, ideals of the conquest of nature, ignoring the mandate to “care for the garden,” and breaking the natural laws of symbiosis and balance in ecosystems) is the source of

“Stewardship of the Environment: An Adventist Imperative,” in *26th International Faith and Learning Seminar* (Loma Linda, CA, 2000), 260.

¹⁷² John Odhiambo Otewa, “Restoration of the Environment: An Adventist Perspective” (Paper, 28th International Seminar on the Integration of Faith and Learning, Babcock University, Ikeja, Nigeria, June 17, 2001), 2.
http://circle.adventist.org/files/CD2008/CD1/ict/vol_28/28cc_363-380.pdf.

our ecological crisis. As writers outside the United States seem more prone to do, Otewa traces the history of environmental summits and treaties and internationally-based recommendations for education, though he notes that these had not kept up with environmental collapse.¹⁷³ Otewa affirms a Christology of Christ as the “bridge” to reconciliation and renewal and sees education about Christ and creation as the tool.

Indonesian scholars M. Rizal Abdi and Ferry Goodman Pardamean look at what Adventists are bringing to the ecotheological discussion through the lens of Lynn White Jr.’s critique, noting the connection between Adventism as representing “Western Christianity” described by White,¹⁷⁴ apocalypticism, and the paucity of work on ecology given the Adventist “emphasis on diet and health.”¹⁷⁵ After all, they ask, how can one be healthy without a healthy environment?¹⁷⁶ They read Tonstad’s ethics; his shift from vegetarianism for health to vegetarianism to spare the lives of animals; and his idea of compassion, in order to suggest that ecological living be an extension “of human interconnectedness with nature and God.”¹⁷⁷ I think this is right. Abdi and Pardamean astutely note the disconnect between the visibility of articles and books dealing with ecotheology and the lack of applications visible in the world. They point to the need for practices.¹⁷⁸

The Argentinian scholar Cristian Varela presents the challenges inherent in “caring for the environment through a biblical and theological approach” and offers “some ethical initiatives

¹⁷³ Otewa, “Restoration of the Environment: An Adventist Perspective,” 8-10.

¹⁷⁴ M. Rizal Abdi and Ferry Goodman Pardamean, “Christianity and Ecology: A Critical Study on the Contribution of SDA Theology Toward Ecology,” *Jurnal Kawistara* 8, no. 3 (February 26, 2019): 276.

¹⁷⁵ Abdi and Pardamean, “Christianity and Ecology,” 276.

¹⁷⁶ Abdi and Pardamean, “Christianity and Ecology,” 276. This goes to my core question: Why do Adventists care about food as fuel, and not food as environment?

¹⁷⁷ Abdi and Pardamean, “Christianity and Ecology,” 283.

¹⁷⁸ Abdi and Pardamean, “Christianity and Ecology,” 285.

for an Adventist ecotheology.”¹⁷⁹ His pattern of development is not unique, making a brief case for the situation as is, naming the accusation of Christian culpability (vis-à-vis Lynn White, Jr.), and anchoring his response in stewardship. His exegetical move notes the ways in which humans and animals are related ontologically as spirit-infused earth (dust, clay), able to reproduce, and given of plants and seeds to eat.¹⁸⁰ Varela’s read of Genesis is that God’s “domination of nature” banishes the “sacralization of it (earth), avoiding all polytheism, pantheism and animism.”¹⁸¹ This is constructed slightly differently than with Mhlanga but similarly echoes a rejection of animism, a concern that does not emerge in ecotheologies from the United States.

In the adoption of Adventist Fundamental Belief #12, the invitation for the convert to leave all former ways behind served as a means of encouraging the abandonment of animism, superstitions, and ancestor “worship.” Historically, the rejection of pantheism and panentheism has roots for Adventists in the heresies of John Harvey Kellogg, leading the church to favor the *ex nihilo* version of the creation account and the idea of God as wholly other, apart from that creation.

As wholly other, it remains important for Adventists (and fundamentalists in general) to have a primarily transcendent God. Transcendence distances God from creation, and elevates revealed truth (scripture) while simultaneously downplaying the knowability of the more immanent God described in Romans 1. Text becomes another way to colonize, one that extends

• ¹⁷⁹ Cristian Varela, “La Mayordomía De La Creación: Hacia Una Ecoteología Adventista,” *Revista Estrategias para el Cumplimiento de la Misión* 16, no. 1 (March 2018): 15-34, translation mine). Varela offers extensive footnotes with credible, current references, often giving additional sources not quoted. The care he takes to examine the text in light of the work of Ellen G. White and contemporary biblical scholars demonstrates a deep respect for the tradition as well as embeds his work within it. His “practical initiatives” go beyond application to suggest lived practices that are in keeping with stewardship of creation.

¹⁸⁰ Varela, “La Mayordomía de La Creación,” 3, translation mine.

¹⁸¹ Varela, “La Mayordomía de La Creación,” 3, translation mine.

the colonial aspects of the mission movement complicit in supplanting indigenous knowledges and oral traditions with text. The clarity and courage writers like Varela and Mhlanga exhibit in navigating this politic in their own spaces is admirable.

As so many do, Varela logically connects Sabbath with creation and mines the many ecologically relevant riches of the Old Testament.¹⁸² The New Testament offers less ecological material but allows for space within soteriology for a return to the conditions of Eden. Christ, in his radically wrought reconciliation of God to the world makes the restoration of nature possible.¹⁸³

Varela turns then to the practical questions, echoing my own articulated musings by asking why Adventists are so eager to demonstrate a literal, historical creation in seven days in the near distant past by a Creator who is above all creation, but then fail to emphasize care for that same creation?¹⁸⁴ His practical suggestions range from ecological consciousness around Sabbath-keeping to educational programs, both curricular and experiential. I found most promising his practical suggestions that Adventists “(t)ake responsibility for the current ecological crisis”¹⁸⁵ and answer the calling “to recover the image of God in Christ,”¹⁸⁶ implying reconciliation with all creation.

¹⁸² My main purpose here is not to repeat the work others have done. Creation, materiality, being living beings, the economy and ecology of Eden, Sabbath, the fall and ecological/environmental changes because of sin, the laws pertaining to human, animal, and land rights, the exaltation of the Creator for the beauties and wonders of creation, God’s rebuke to Job, the mourning of the prophets over ruin of the land, and the eschatological foreshadowing of a full restoration of all things make the Old Testament ripe for those looking for textual reasons to be ecologically minded.

¹⁸³ Here again, the ontological separation of God from the world is re-emphasized.

¹⁸⁴ Varela, “La Mayordomía de La Creación,”12.

¹⁸⁵ Varela, “La Mayordomía de La Creación,”14.

¹⁸⁶ Varela, “La Mayordomía de La Creación,”15.

Theological Voices from Australia, Europe, and North America

Doukhan unintentionally identifies at least two of the key challenges to doing ecotheology in the Adventist context. First, there is a literalism in hermeneutic yielding an eschatology of certainty: *what will be* is as certain as *what has been*, as both are revelation. Second, we see a balancing of expectations that surround the salvation event of the Advent with the Sabbath celebration of all that has been made “very good” by the Creator in the “present reality” through the embodied goodness that materiality and time embrace. For Jacques Doukhan, the eschatological salvation event represents the “future of history ... belong[ing] to the prophetic domain, [and] pointing to the heavenly order.”¹⁸⁷ While the declaration of the Creator is a present reality, he quotes Heschel in saying “we name and *exploit* reality,” by which he means the created order.¹⁸⁸

Doukhan affirms that Sabbath-based materiality implies care for bodily health, though he misses the opportunity to suggest we ought to see the Sabbath as a time to pursue environmental health, taking an anthropocentric view of both Sabbath rest and eschatological redemption. What he does name is the tension John Brunt refers to as the “Now and Not Yet,”¹⁸⁹ that is to say the liminal space occupied between creation and the eschatological certainty and fulfillment of the earth made new. He has anchored the “real” as being that ineffable heavenly reality, which is materially realized as it becomes Earth’s eschatological reality. Ecology, then, can only be grounded in stewardship.

¹⁸⁷ Jacques Doukhan, “The Tension of Seventh-day Adventist Identity: An Existential & Eschatological Perspective,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 26, no. 1 (2015): 30.

¹⁸⁸ Doukhan, “Tension of Seventh-day Adventist Identity,” 30, emphasis mine.

¹⁸⁹ See John Brunt, *The Now & The Not Yet*.

Warren C. Trenchard¹⁹⁰ is one among many who cite Lynn White, Jr.'s (1967)¹⁹¹ argument that Christianity “bears a huge burden of guilt” based upon the ways in which Western scientific concepts and technologies are “tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature.”¹⁹² “Pagans” he notes, and “adherents from other, particularly Eastern religions [have] ties to nature [that] are thoroughgoing and spiritual.”¹⁹³ Trenchard then contextualizes his “Adventist Theology of Ecology” in the broadest sense by noting that Christian anthropology has distinguished and identified itself as a religion apart from as well as over and above nature. Adventists, he suggests, fit within this broad frame.

Surveying E. G. White, Trenchard places “[t]he traditional fascination of Adventists with nature” squarely within the larger Adventist “commitment to health” and the benefits of time in nature to “mind and body.”¹⁹⁴ This is of significant interest to me in the wider frame of my work. Why is it that a denomination so intent on coming to literal terms with the Genesis account of creation has so little interest in preserving what God declared “very good” (Genesis 1)?

¹⁹⁰ While Trenchard’s work referenced here on ecotheology relies on constructive theology, it is not a constructive project *per se*. Although he touches on stewardship, the arc of salvation history known as “The Great Controversy” serves as the basis for his “theology of ecology,” framing doctrines of Creation, the Fall of Humankind (using the term “Deterioration,” where the nomenclature serves to remind readers of what we are both working against and looking for deliverance from), Salvation, Anticipation, and Restoration. Defining Adventist particularity best, these are filtered through the lens of two doctrines he names as symbols, “Sabbath” and “Sanctuary,” using materiality and embodiment as hooks upon which to connect to human ecological responsibility.

¹⁹¹ Warren C. Trenchard, *For the Beauty of the Earth: An Adventist Theology of Ecology*, Spectrum 31:3 (Summer 2003): 35. He cites Lynn White’s article, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” which appeared in *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-7.

¹⁹² Trenchard, “For the Beauty of the Earth,” 35.

¹⁹³ Trenchard, “For the Beauty of the Earth,” 34.

¹⁹⁴ Trenchard, “For the Beauty of the Earth,” 35.

Trenchard proposes “that Seventh-day Adventists develop an Adventist theology of the earth within a paradigm of five basic affirmations and two symbols.”¹⁹⁵ These doctrinal affirmations are creation, deterioration, salvation, anticipation, and restoration. The symbols are sanctuary and Sabbath. But as Arthur Patrick notes, “Trenchard is most compelling of all in the application he makes of the doctrine of the Sanctuary, underlining the importance of God’s view of humans and their environment.”¹⁹⁶ Elegantly subtle, the effort moves toward a “theology of the earth that will result in theological responsibility.”¹⁹⁷

Associate Professor of Systematic Theology Young Chun Kim¹⁹⁸ may be one of the few doing ecotheology in the Adventist Church and higher education complex. A specialist in soteriology, he uses the Adventist frame of the arc of salvation (beginning in Genesis with creation and ending in Revelation with restoration) to establish an Adventist basis for ecotheology. Tight as the strictures appear to be, he uses Adventist historiography to describe the wider Christian context for the formation (if not the uniqueness) of Adventist views on salvation (particularly in light of Arminianism) as well as Sabbath and the law.

Monism, based in the essential materiality of creation and life, is also central to his argument. If resurrected life is also embodied life, and environment is essential to sustaining that resurrected life going forward, then the idea that “spiritual” reality is all Christians need attend to is null and patently false. The eschatological implications shift accordingly, and we then have the bones of an Adventist ecotheology. Given the conservative context in which he is situated, Kim

¹⁹⁵ Trenchard, “For the Beauty of the Earth,” 36.

¹⁹⁶ Arthur Patrick, “Review: ‘For the Beauty of the Earth: An Adventist Theology of Ecology,’” *Spirituality and Science* 4, no. 1 *The Christian and the Environment* (2003): 18.

¹⁹⁷ Patrick, “Review,” 18.

¹⁹⁸ Although he is South Korean and represents a hybridity that is not necessarily clear in his text, I include Kim with the North American writers because of his professional academic location.

courageously and insightfully notes that ecofeminism has always understood this point: the importance of materiality, meaning soul as spirit + body, a spiritual-material monism without material reductionism.

Kim exegetes Romans 8 and finds a law still useful as a means to measure the active faith that Adventists see leading to sanctification. Further, he sees Sabbath as the chiasmic center and glue¹⁹⁹ holding the two parts of the law together: love for God and love for humanity (and for all creation). For Kim, Sabbath functions as the center of ecotheological motive and practice. The opportunity embedded in Sabbath “for modelling ourselves after the divine”²⁰⁰ features as an important check on an “other-worldly” eschatology as well as a moment of truth regarding our own transformation and care of creation.

At the core of his argument is an Arminian view of salvation in which the choice to believe not only results in the justification of an individual sinner but also in the ongoing choice to become more Christlike (sanctification), in fulfillment of the commands to love God supremely and love one’s neighbor (including nonhuman creation) in a way that is preparatory and anticipatory of the *eschaton*. Sabbath is the “jewel” common to both loves, embedded with an ethic of creation care suggesting that those who do not care for the first Earth will not inherit the second.

While Kim might be representative of efforts within the realm of systematic theology, Professor of Religion Ben Holdsworth takes a practical and unique turn in approaching climate change through the matrix of risk, as in “risk management.” While he does not reference Ron

¹⁹⁹ Young Chun Kim, “Sanctification as Impetus for Creation Care,” in *Ecotheology in the Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding the Divine and Nature*, Melissa J. Brotton, ed., Forward by John Cobb, Jr. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 59.

²⁰⁰ Kim, “Sanctification as Impetus,” 60.

Lawson's work, which shows Adventism's growth primarily among the dominantly global poor,²⁰¹ he clearly understands that the indices used in his research (such as the ODI Poverty Vulnerability Index 2030) indicate global poor populations will be most affected by climate change. These global poor are Adventists.

He frames this question of disproportionate effect using the church's Official Statement on Global Poverty (2010),²⁰² which allows him to look at risk in ecological, economic, and social justice terms. In doing so, he names two important tensions. "The first is between environmental care and an apocalyptic evangelical perspective." Sound familiar? The second is "between church positions in regard to the environment, and our core cultural value of SDA institutional development and people/membership in relation to those institutions."²⁰³

His ecotheological work is inextricably tied, then, to social justice work embedded in ecclesiology. Here, he proposes that "Mutuality," "Resilience," "Endurance," and "Productivity"²⁰⁴ serve to meet the needs of the climate-embattled church. Having identified these core characteristics of his ecclesiology biblically, he is then able to move to a call for "care for the environment" and seven other things.²⁰⁵ While not aiming to be a comprehensive ecotheology, this is an important non-threatening direction of study, interjecting social justice and poverty alleviation through an ecclesiology of global connectedness in the body of Christ.

²⁰¹ Ronald Lawson and Ryan T. Cragun, "Comparing the Geographic Distributions and Growth of Mormons, Adventists, and Witnesses," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 2 (2012): 220–40.

²⁰² Ben Holdsworth, "Rethinking Adventist Ecclesiology for a Climate-Impacted World" (Adventist Society for Religious Studies, San Diego, 2014), 4.

²⁰³ Holdsworth, "Rethinking Adventist Ecclesiology," 4.

²⁰⁴ Holdsworth, "Rethinking Adventist Ecclesiology," 14–17.

²⁰⁵ Holdsworth, "Rethinking Adventist Ecclesiology," 18–19.

Constructive Emergence: Readings of Resistance

The Adventist scholar I have identified most closely with ecotheology is Sigve K. Tonstad.²⁰⁶ He is particularly important both because he is prolific and because he is one of the very few Adventists working positively outside the “readings of recovery” hermeneutical frame. In his commentary on Romans, insights emerge that are solidly within some strains of Adventist theology, while pushing the hermeneutical boundaries currently in vogue in the Adventist Church in really helpful ways. Oft-referenced, his books on Sabbath,²⁰⁷ Revelation,²⁰⁸ Romans,²⁰⁹ and his numerous published articles and blogs on the *Spectrum* magazine website are quite consistently, if not outrightly, embedded with ecological concern, a hermeneutical lens from which to view text, even life itself.

Creation and the Sabbath, which is part of the blessing given to human life, nonhuman life, and all creation are integral parts of the Genesis/Revelation biblical frame of Tonstad’s ecotheological work. In light of the crisis before us, Tonstad shares the critique that self-interest as a motivation for environmentalism “misses the mark,”²¹⁰ failing to take into account ethics

²⁰⁶ Sigve K. Tonstad writes from many frames. He’s a M.D. who also holds a PhD in New Testament from the University of St. Andrews. It was there, as he states on page 5 of the *Preface*, that he met Norman C. Habel, editor of *The Earth Bible Commentary* series. While not technically a theologian, Tonstad exegetes ideas that have theological implications and engages with tenets of faith that have been part of the project of systematic theology.

²⁰⁷ Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009).

²⁰⁸ Sigve K. Tonstad, *Revelation*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019).

²⁰⁹ Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Letter to the Romans: Paul among the Ecologists*, ed. Norman C. Habel, vol. 7, *The Earth Bible Commentary* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2016). As this text is explicitly intended to be ecological, I focus on it.

²¹⁰ Tonstad, *Lost Meaning*, 390.

and “conscience.”²¹¹ It is the Christocentric frame of Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer that points us to our place in the world of our habitation.²¹²

Lynn White Jr.’s claims about the Christian origin of the current ecological crisis are contested by Tonstad who does not read the Christian account the same way a traditional Christian might. Tonstad writes:

[T]here cannot be any separation between Creator and the world. Should such a breach arise, it will not be because of intrinsic disparity between the message of the Bible and the evidence of nature. The alienation must be forced ... by a failure of ideology as in the early Christian disparagement of the body and the earth, by unfamiliarity, or by a breach in the human perception.”²¹³

Creation and Sabbath are celebrated in the biblical story in such a way that philosophical and theological formulations that discount the importance of materiality, and the way in which humans participate and are grounded or embedded in that materiality, are textually divergent, not textually normative.

Tonstad’s acquiescence to “White’s savage critique”²¹⁴ comes in the context of this failure of ideology. In addition to the “repudiation of materiality”²¹⁵ mentioned above, Tonstad joins the voices of other scholars who would add excessive Christian “preoccupation with the fate of the soul” to this list of failures. These, along with Christian complicity in “acquiescing to

²¹¹ Tonstad, *Lost Meaning*, 390, relying on Matthew Scully, *Dominion: The power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002), xi.

²¹² There’s not adequate space in this work to effectively reference Tonstad’s work on the suffering of animals in the Adventist context, though he mentions it in this work, as well as a published article “Swine of the Times: Ecumenism, Ecology, and Ethics in the Era of Factory Farming,” *Spectrum Magazine*, 37, no. 3 (Summer 2009), 16-22.

²¹³ Tonstad, *Lost Meaning*, 359.

²¹⁴ Tonstad, *Lost Meaning*, 395.

²¹⁵ Tonstad, *Lost Meaning*, 395.

an era of exploitation of nature's finite resources"²¹⁶ amount to Tonstad's only concession to White's point, as Tonstad says, that "nature has no reason for existence save to serve man."²¹⁷

However, that is all he concedes. In White's claims that it was the Christian rejection of animism that made ecologic ruin a point of indifference, Tonstad finds White shows "gross ignorance of the true Judeo-Christian idea of Creation as it is found in the Bible and institutionalized in the weekly Sabbath."²¹⁸ Rather, Tonstad identifies the loss of the "biblical view of Creation"²¹⁹ with the embedded ecological sensibilities of the Sabbath as the cause. Quoting Claus Westermann, Tonstad agrees that such a loss pushes theology into the realm of anthropology, where it "collapse(s) around us."²²⁰ The ecological potential of the "lost meaning" might best be summarized in this quote from Westermann:

The Sabbath brings a message of togetherness instead of separation, permanence instead of transience, God's presence instead of God's absence, freedom instead of subjugation, continuity instead of discontinuity, wholeness instead of disintegration, other-centeredness instead of arbitrariness, and divine narrative more than divine imperative.²²¹

God as Creator and Redeemer can and will bring the healing anticipated in Psalm 92. A Christian ecology or biblical ecotheology that reads Sabbath in context has the best chance of reminding our embodied, material, situated, and created selves that we are not separate from or apart from the created order, but deeply and intrinsically situated in it, responsible for its care.

²¹⁶ Tonstad, *Lost Meaning*, 395.

²¹⁷ Tonstad, *Lost Meaning*, 395. Tonstad quotes Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967): 1207.

²¹⁸ Tonstad, *Lost Meaning*, 395.

²¹⁹ Tonstad, *Lost Meaning*, 395.

²²⁰ Tonstad, *Lost Meaning*, 396.

²²¹ Claus Westermann, "Biblical Reflection on Creator-Creation," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson, Issues in Religion and Theology 6 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 92 as cited in Tonstad, *Lost Meaning*, 514.

In placing “Paul among the ecologists,”²²² Tonstad frames his thesis through the lens of Paul’s “concern and primary errand”²²³, which is to be the “apostle of the faithfulness of God.”²²⁴ The embodied connectedness of such proves crucial in establishing Paul as an ecologist and emerges as the primary goal of this work.²²⁵

Great care is taken to name Paul’s “ecological guild . . . made up of the patriarchs, priests, and prophets among whom we have located him (Paul) already and of whom he is said to be one.”²²⁶ The “Ecological Paul” is in harmony with the themes of creation and Sabbath, given his “embrace of materiality,” the material drawn from Habakkuk and Isaiah, the inclusion of “non-human creation,” the passion around “God’s faithfulness to *all* creation,” and the servant vs. king outlook.²²⁷ Tonstad finds this latter trait most convincing, as it has everything to do with “humility and compassion.”²²⁸ “Compassion” arises as an important bridge word between the present ecological concerns and the text. Tonstad notes: “Ecologists who cry out for compassion will in Romans encounter a message of compassion for human beings, non-human creatures, and the earth.”²²⁹

Time and time again, Tonstad demonstrates exegetically fresh reading on Paul—and offers a biblical, hence approachable, ecotheology. One example: Romans 7 is exegeted in light

²²² Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Letter to the Romans: Paul among the Ecologists*, ed. Norman C. Habel, vol. 7, The Earth Bible Commentary (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2016). 18.

²²³ Tonstad, *Romans*, x.

²²⁴ Tonstad, *Romans*, ix.

²²⁵ The remaining three stated goals are set in Tonstad’s educational agenda, that is reaching those students with interest either in Paul, ecotheology, or neither, but likely nevertheless to have been exposed to either or both.

²²⁶ Tonstad, *Romans*, 18.

²²⁷ Tonstad, *Romans*, 20.

²²⁸ Tonstad, *Romans*, 21.

²²⁹ Tonstad, *Romans*, xiii.

of Romans 1. When Paul writes of the law, the split between the law as good and the law as condemning is conceived of as permanent. Our status as slaves, either to sin and death or to Christ, is also part of this split. Tonstad's move is to note the "becoming" that happens, because "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death, thereby making the law "the law of the spirit of life."²³⁰

This is, of course, through Jesus, who "relegates sin to oblivion,"²³¹ as he cries "Abba! Father!" as he dies.²³² The ecological move is to understand the transformation of the law of death back to a law of life in Christ is to see this as what Tonstad will call "the background of Paul's widescreen" vision through which "he turns to give voice to non-human creation (8.19-22), and why we hear non-human creation, believers, and the Spirit speaking the same language of hope (8.22, 23, 26)."²³³

In *Revelation*, Tonstad's anticipated contribution to the Baker Academic Paideia Commentary Series, his ecological sensibilities come through in his read of Revelation 21:1-8, the new heaven and new earth. Here he clarifies the meaning of "new" as substantively, qualitatively new. It's not "a replacement" earth, but rather he favors the translation of Revelation 21:1a as "I saw a *renewed* heaven and *renewed* earth."²³⁴ This is counterintuitive, but the exegetical move makes it possible to see again the sin problem not as unique to the human and earthly situation, but as a logical extension of the "war broke out in heaven" (Revelation 12:7-9) passage whereby we see clearly that "heaven ... broke first."²³⁵ This is revolutionary, as it holds

²³⁰ Tonstad, *Romans*, 229-231.

²³¹ Tonstad, *Romans*, 233.

²³² Tonstad, *Romans*, 237.

²³³ Tonstad, *Romans*, 237.

²³⁴ Sigve K. Tonstad, *Revelation*, Paideia Commentaries on The New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019): 303.

²³⁵ Tonstad, *Revelation*, 303, 4.

the key to a biblical basis for an Adventist (and Evangelical) reversal of the idea that what happens here on earth is either inevitable or inconsequential. Both inevitability and inconsequentiality breed complacency, something Earth has never been able to afford.

Voices from the Sciences, Arts, and Humanities

In addition to explicitly theological work, there are ecotheological works emerging out of the arts, humanities, and sciences, as well. I will reference a few. On the science side, Loma Linda University (LLU) and the Center for Biodiversity and Conservation Studies biologists William K. Hayes (LLU) and Floyd E. Hayes (Pacific Union College) have published a number of articles on ecological and ecotheological themes. Jo Ann Davidson wrote the beginning chapter of *Entrusted*, and the Hayes brothers composed the last chapter.²³⁶

Literalism and the hermeneutic of recovery characterize their biblical work, which is nonetheless careful. Like others, the Hayes brothers emphasize God's valuation of creation and the order He sustains. While they note the ethic of creation care embedded in Sabbath, but unique to them, they also note creation is "neither sacred nor evil, but a means to achieve the goals of the Creator."²³⁷

Philosophical/theologically speaking, this sets the physical world ontologically into a philosophical pragmatism, while reading textual evidences literally. The created order exists by the will of the Creator to fill an empty Earth, to be sustained by a species set apart to tend the garden. There is also a poignant urgency for Adventists to do more to care for creation.²³⁸

²³⁶ Floyd E. Hayes and William K. Hayes, "What Do Adventists Have to Say to the World About Environmental Stewardship?," in *Entrusted: Christians and Environmental Care* (Mexico: Adventus International University Publishers, 2013), 253-262.

²³⁷ Hayes and Hayes, "What Do Adventists Have to Say?," 254.

²³⁸ Hayes and Hayes, "What Do Adventists Have to Say?," 260-1.

Adventist Voices on Food, Environment, and Ecology

Some Adventist researchers are studying the subject of healthful eating as an environmental question. Among this relatively small group, Joan Sabaté, M.D., DrPH is a significant figure writing from a positional and institutional context of faith. Sabaté serves as Director of the LLU Center for Nutrition, Healthy Lifestyle and Disease Prevention. He's also a full professor at the LLU School of Medicine, and LLU School of Public Health with authorship of numerous articles and publications.²³⁹ Additionally, Dr. Sabaté is Chair of the International Congress on Vegetarian Nutrition. He's a prolific researcher, scholar and author. Adventist theology, medical and educational ministries, and advocacy for holism built on bodily health and well-being underly the larger environmental concerns he raises, often through foodways and diet.

In a collaborative work²⁴⁰ presented by scholars (including Sabaté) in 2009 at the Fifth International Congress on Vegetarian Nutrition, a direct line is drawn from food demand to production, the problem of modern agricultural methods (referencing agribusiness, factory farming, and large monocrop farms), in light of dietary choices. Harold J. Marlow, et al. raised the question, "Does what you eat matter?," comparing vegetarian and nonvegetarian diets.²⁴¹ After looking at water and energy consumption, application of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, waste and the toll such practices take on the land, the results were clear, "the absolute

²³⁹ LLU is a General Conference institution and represents mainline Adventism. Adventist commitments to literal biblical interpretation and the factual truth of Genesis do mean that considerable energies and resources continue to flow toward the production of a credible creation science. Nevertheless, LLU is a very positive representation of the Adventist commitment to human health and thriving.

²⁴⁰ One of the authors is William K. Hayes, mentioned previously.

²⁴¹ Harold J. Marlow et al., "Diet And The Environment: Does What You Eat Matter?," *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 89, no. 5 (May 1, 2009): 1699S, <https://doi.org/10.3945/ajcn.2009.26736Z>.

data are highly illustrative”²⁴² that there are clear environmental benefits (most obvious in water, energy, fertilizer and pesticide use) to a vegetarian diet.

A 2014 *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* supplement featured a summary of the papers of the Sixth Annual International Congress on Vegetarian Nutrition, which was held in February of 2013.^{243, 244}

For millennia, meatless diets have been advocated on the basis of values, and large segments of the world population have thrived on plant-based diets. “Going back” to plant-based diets worldwide seems to be a reasonable alternative for a sustainable future. *Policies in favor of the global adoption of plant-based diets will simultaneously optimize the food supply, health, environmental, and social justice outcomes for the world’s population. Implementing such nutrition policy is perhaps one of the most rational and moral paths for a sustainable future of the human race and other living creatures of the biosphere that we share.*²⁴⁵

There is no equivocation in these bold statements. Plant-based eating may be our best collective hope of slowing our race to unsustainability.

In using the word “values” in the quotation above, Sabaté and Soret understand “religious values” to belong among ethical and philosophical considerations.²⁴⁶ Significant numbers of Buddhists, Hindus, and others have practiced vegetarianism for centuries. While they do not

²⁴² Marlow et al., “Diet and the Environment,” 1701S.

²⁴³ Sujatha Rajaram, Michelle Wien, and Joan Sabaté, eds., “Sixth International Congress on Vegetarian Nutrition,” *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 100, no. Supplement (July 2014): 303S-304S, https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn.107.suppl_1.303S.

²⁴⁴ An interesting aside, this conference was promoted by the INC, the International Nut & Dried Fruit Council. A portion of the Conference was dedicated to the qualities of nuts for disease prevention. While a conference could have more controversial sponsors, agribusiness is ubiquitous and unchallenged in the role it plays in environmental degradation. See “6th International Congress on Vegetarian Nutrition,” Industry, INC International Nut&DriedFruit, accessed October 24, 2020, <https://www.nutfruit.org/health-professionals/event/6th-international-congress-on-vegetarian-nutrition>.

²⁴⁵ Joan Sabaté and Sam Soret, “Sustainability of Plant-Based Diets: Back to the Future,” *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 100, Issue Supplement 1 (July 2014): 481S, <https://doi.org/>, <https://doi.org/10.3945/ajcn.113.071522>, *italics mine*.

²⁴⁶ Sabaté and Soret, “Sustainability of Plant-Based Diets,” 481S.

name the colonial frame behind the global turn to Western-style meat-eating diets, they do note that increasing global affluence has created new demands.²⁴⁷ Their observation contains an element of micropolitics, as well. By “policies,” Sabaté and Soret mean “national and international food policies” policies. Economically, part of the needed change lies with food subsidies, focusing perhaps on small-scale ag.²⁴⁸ Finally, Their use of the word “moral” hints at important questions around factory farming, animal abuse, water and soil contamination, and the destruction of wildlife habitats. This is all significant, if more controversial outside of the spheres of education and science. My sense is that the moral question needs raising within the sciences more often—and it certainly ought to be a theological consideration.

In addition to his collaborations, Joan Sabaté is often cited by other notable scholars in his field. David Pimentel (d. 2019) was a distinguished professor, Cornell University and prolific author of books and articles dealing with issues relevant to climate change and Earth’s finite capacities. He and his wife Marcia Pimentel (retired), a senior lecturer in the Division of Nutritional Sciences, College of Human Ecology at Cornell University, participated in the Congresses on Vegetarian Nutrition at LLU. Citing Loma Linda investigators including Sabaté, they also express concern about diet and environmental sustainability, and their inquiry found that veganism was the most environmentally sustainable option, given the fossil energy used to produce foods. The lacto-ovo-vegetarian diet was, on the whole, better than meat-based diets, though both were deemed unsustainable by their research findings.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ Sabaté and Soret, “Sustainability of Plant-Based Diets,” 481S.

²⁴⁸ Sabaté and Soret, “Sustainability of Plant-Based Diets,” 481S.

²⁴⁹ David Pimentel and Marcia Pimentel, “Sustainability of Meat-Based and Plant-Based Diets and the Environment,” *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 78, no. 3 (September 1, 2003): 662-3S, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/78.3.664S>.

Claus Leitzmann, another contributor to the Congresses on Vegetarian Nutrition, offered this summary of the way in which a vegetarian approach to eating serves the environment:

On average, land requirements for meat-protein production are 10 times greater than for plant-protein production. About 40% of the world's grain harvest is fed to animals. Half of this grain would be more than enough to feed all hungry people of our planet. Animal manure, which is produced in huge amounts by industrial agriculture, causes high levels of potentially carcinogenic nitrates in drinking water and vegetables. Animal production requires considerably energy and water resources and leads to deforestation, overgrazing, and overfishing.²⁵⁰

Leitzmann's lens for this work is "nutrition ecology," which he described in 2003 as a "new field ... that deals with the local and global consequences of food production, processing, trade, and consumption ... go[ing] beyond econutrition, which is limited to the interactions of nutrition and the environment."²⁵¹ Although I do not know Leitzmann's religious leanings, if any, his paper, presented at the LLU-sponsored Congress, found that "[o]ne of the most effective ways to achieve the goals of nutrition ecology ... is a vegetarian lifestyle."²⁵²

As of today, the lens of nutrition ecology has morphed and takes on a slightly different set of priorities. According to LLU's School of Public Health website, "environmental nutrition" is a science that examines "the interrelationships between our food choices, our environment and our health."²⁵³ In other words, the economic aspect has been dropped.

²⁵⁰ Leitzmann, "Nutrition Ecology, 658S."

²⁵¹ Claus Leitzmann, "Nutrition Ecology: The Contribution of Vegetarian Diets," *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 78, no. Supplement (2003): 657S, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/78.3.657S>.

²⁵² Leitzmann, "Nutrition Ecology, 659S." Here, he references a book edited by Joan Sabaté, *Vegetarian Nutrition*, 2001, a volume with numerous contributors from Loma Linda university, including a section on ethics and environmental impacts of dietary choices.

²⁵³ "Environmental Nutrition: Examining the Interrelationships Between Our Food Choices, Our Environment and Our Health.," Institutional, Loma Linda University School of Public Health, n.d., <https://environmentalnutrition.org/>.

The ground-breaking article, the precursor to Sabaté's latest book,²⁵⁴ highlights the severe reality that "[f]ood systems must operate within environmental constraints to avoid disastrous consequences for the biosphere."²⁵⁵ Here the interest is clearly and dominantly food and nutrition informed by context, that is, how food systems affect the environment.

Essentially, there is evolutionary development in the public health and clinical nutrition contexts, whereby ideas include the ways patterns of eating affect health, as well as environmental degradation. Our food systems are "using natural resources and producing waste at unsustainable rates."²⁵⁶ There is no ambiguity or equivocation in this statement. The validity of the research comes, in part, from the famous, universally recognized and often referenced "Adventist Health Studies," the data of which offers correlative means with massive sampling.

These diet and environment publications have a political element: "policy and governance are crucial factors for food sovereignty—for example, food systems can become largely controlled by a small number of corporations rather than by everyone involved, including consumers," Sabaté writes.²⁵⁷ Australian Ecologist Ian Wallis, for his part, offers what he calls "semi-vegetarianism" as a practical alternative to plant-based and lacto-ovo-vegetarian diets,²⁵⁸ because of the overwhelming powers of business and politics that protect the status quo, as well as people's habits and preferences. While he is pessimistic about the efficacy of education based

²⁵⁴ Joan Sabaté, *Environmental Nutrition: Connecting Health and Nutrition with Environmentally Sustainable Diets*. (Cambridge: Academic Press, 2019).

²⁵⁵ Joan Sabaté, Helen Harwatt, and Samuel Soret, "Environmental Nutrition: A New Frontier for Public Health," *American Journal of Public Health* 106, no. 5 (May 2016): 815, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2016.303046>.

²⁵⁶ Sabaté, Harwatt, and Soret, "Environmental Nutrition," 819.

²⁵⁷ Sabaté, Harwatt, and Soret, "Environmental Nutrition," 817.

²⁵⁸ Ian Wallis, "Semi-Vegetarianism – Good for Animals, Good for the Environment and Good for Humans," *Australian Zoologist* 39, no. 1 (December 30, 2016): 127–45, <https://doi.org/10.7882/AZ.2016.017>.

on the number of Australians who eat properly and exercise, he hopes that education around food production (farming), including raising awareness around animal rights and ethics, will inspire people to eat *less* meat.²⁵⁹

As practical as Wallis's suggestion may appear to be, the fact is that knowledge does not seem to change people's eating habits. Environmental benefit, the opportunity to improve the lot of farmed animals, and the overwhelming evidences of the health benefits of plant-based diets do not tend to change behaviors. For example, João Graça *et al* look at the issue psychologically, seeking to understand "factors that may hinder or promote personal disposition to change habits towards less harmful choices."²⁶⁰ Seeking to understand why people did not make better choices, the researchers chose to use "moral disengagement theory" and found resonance.

The first pattern, "reconstruction of the harmful conduct"²⁶¹ justified the behavior in terms of biological necessity and affinity "with cultural roots and gastronomic traditions."²⁶² The second observable pattern was "obscuring personal responsibility,"²⁶³ centered on the rejection of any real alternatives.²⁶⁴ The third pattern was "disregard for the negative consequences."²⁶⁵ The tendency in moral disengagement is to make false comparatives, noting that there are "worse things" than eating meat.²⁶⁶ "Active avoidance" was manifest in responses such as "[d]on't make

²⁵⁹ Wallis, "Semi-Vegetarianism," 140.

²⁶⁰ João Graça, Maria Manuela Calheiros, and Abílio Oliveira, "Moral Disengagement in Harmful but Cherished Food Practices? An Exploration into the Case of Meat," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 27 (January 21, 2014): 749, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-014-9488-9>.

²⁶¹ Graça, Calheiros, and Oliveira, "Moral Disengagement," 756.

²⁶² Graça, Calheiros, and Oliveira, "Moral Disengagement," 756.

²⁶³ Graça, Calheiros, and Oliveira, "Moral Disengagement," 756.

²⁶⁴ Graça, Calheiros, and Oliveira, "Moral Disengagement," 756.

²⁶⁵ Graça, Calheiros, and Oliveira, "Moral Disengagement," 757.

²⁶⁶ Graça, Calheiros, and Oliveira, "Moral Disengagement," 757.

me think about it.”²⁶⁷ These are a few of the key findings. Through the lens of food choices, moral disengagement theory offers a possible explanation for resistance to ecotheological reflection and formation, as well as ecological living.

This relatively new focus of study on food and ecology within the scientific and academic communities is slowly beginning to appear in educational publications, and it occasionally receives mention in denominational magazine articles. There is also emergent interdisciplinary work involving ethicists like Mark Carr (LLU)²⁶⁸ and Zane Yi, Associate Dean of LLU’s School of Religion. Yi contributes to a collaborative work outlining the myriad ways in which Adventism exercises global influence on the subject of food, including a holistic theology (anthropology); Adventist medical work, both institutional and missional; education on all levels; churches incorporating missional and theological holism into their teachings, emphasis on healthy living and standards; humanitarian efforts; Adventist research in a variety of fields alongside foods invented and mass-produced by Adventists; Adventist research such as the Adventist Health Studies; academic research in areas such as nutrition and environmental sciences; and even the Congresses described above.²⁶⁹

In the last seven pages, one of my guiding research questions, “Why do Adventists care about food as fuel for the body, not a means to care for the environment?” is answered. Clearly some Adventists, particularly on the level of scientific nutritional and public health research, *do* care about nutrition as impacting the environment and are leading in the fields of environmental nutrition, publishing considerable amounts of materials on the subject. The primary concern of

²⁶⁷ Graça, Calheiros, and Oliveira, “Moral Disengagement,” 757.

²⁶⁸ See Sabaté, *Vegetarian Nutrition*.

²⁶⁹ Jim E. Banta et al., “The Global Influence of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church on Diet,” *Religions* 9, no. 9 (September 2018): 251, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9090251>.

most of these works is not longevity or personal health, and no mention is made of spiritual benefits. Food scarcity and food sovereignty are emergent issues and part of the picture.

Interdependence, implicit in these interdisciplinary efforts, points to real-world complexities, whether socio-political, economic (big agriculture, business), health-based, or environmental. In the Adventist context, ground-breaking steps have brought diet into dialogue primarily with personal and public health, environmental health, ethics, and energy/resource management. The Banta, *et alia* article cited above further references church history, ministries of compassion as well as church and mission outreach, agribusiness and invention, Adventist education, and Adventist healthcare. In terms of ecotheology, these categories point my attention to anthropology, ecclesiology, mission, congregational Sabbath practices, and Communion.

Adventist Agribusiness and Food Production

Banta, Lee, Hodgkin, Yi, Fanica and Sabaté's article, "The Global Influence of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church on Diet" hints at some important areas for further exploration, relevant to the question of Adventists in relationship to food and ecology. The first and most obvious area in need of interrogation is food in the global frame. In what ways has Adventist food been a global influence? How and in what context(s) have Adventists become globally influential in relationship to food? Has this influence been ecological?

While a full exposition of these questions well beyond the scope of this paper, the colonial frame of Adventist global expansion cannot be ignored, as it is one of the key hermeneutical tools to answer my guiding questions around power dynamics. Here, a postcolonial frame will serve as a way to name issues. While a decolonial approach could be useful, I see naming the issues and framing the histories as a solid first step. In the next chapter, I offer a brief history of Adventism in terms of Whiteness, apocalypticism, the rise of

Fundamentalism, and the movements that mimic White Evangelicalism. All of these problematize a quest for ecological interest, ecological praxis, and the embrace of ecotheology, presenting the challenges that must be overcome if one is to move Adventism to embrace creation care with any kind of deliberateness or vigor.

Summary

This review of selected Adventist works has briefly tended to the origins of Adventist interest in ecologically related themes. Apocalypticism's cataclysmic events, portending the denouement of history, are often "natural." Ellen G. White writings, with her romantic conceptualization of nature, stewardship, and ethical mandates to treat creatures humanely as well as her comments on gardening are excellent historical indicators of Adventist positionality as the world entered WWI. Also briefly chronicled are the changes that lead to the environmental revolution of the 1960's, the backdrop for contemporary evidences of the Anthropocene and our dire planetary situation.

This chapter covered official Adventist Statements related to the environment. The radical shift away from grounded concerns (including ecology) to Evangelical and Fundamentalist issues though the 1980's offers insights into the source of resistances to ecological embrace. Here, the connection between environmental degradation and the suppression of women in ministry is explored through Adventist women writing ecofeminism.

In keeping with stated interests in decentering White, male, North American normativity, special effort was made to feature the voices of women theologians, pastors, teachers and laity. Here, the ecofeminism of Prinz-McMillan sits next to the biblical and systematic work of Jo Ann Davidson, both of whom consider food an important part of environmental care. Contemporary entries from the humanities and theology represented in Melissa J. Brotton's important edited

volumes bring forward a range of thought and feature leading women theologians and biblical scholars. Dita Aneta's non-academic but thoughtful works round out the field.

Global Adventist Scholarship primarily from the Southern Hemisphere brings theological themes, land ethics, and global issues forward. Of these scholars, Christian Varela is probably as close to writing a full Adventist ecotheology as might be found. His theme of reconciliation of the world to God in Christ carries forward to creation itself. By including creation, Varela offers a path to environmental stewardship. Male voices representing Australian, North American and European scholarship are surveyed, offering a range of theological and practical possibilities. The scholarship of Sigve Tonstad is particularly noted and featured for his study with Habel and use of Habel's hermeneutics of resistance. So much courageous, positive, and high-quality scholarship has been put to print by Adventist writers and theologians.

Finally, the work of Adventist researchers working outside the fields of Theology and Religion are tended to primarily because they integrate research on food, nutrition/health, and environmental health. Here, it becomes evident that Adventists are concerned with food as relates to environmental sustainability. The interplay of institutional histories, mission, agribusiness, education and healthcare with food highlight the importance of food in relationship to the research questions that have given impetus to this dissertation.

Chapter 3 – Complexity and Clarity: Structural, Socio-Political, and Theological Barriers to Adventist Embrace of Ecology

What makes writing a chapter such as this phenomenally challenging can be summarized by conflated complexities. For example, one must consider movement through time as well as the ways in which something that was continues to be into the present. This may be something that has not yet evolved; has evolved but still embodies what it had been in the remnants that carry forward; or that continues to be present in the form of personal or collective memory. There are histories, inevitably perspectival and selective in focus, and there is an implicit value or set of values underlying what is being paid attention to, and what remains invisible.

To speak of an entity representationally serves a reductionist role, and so the task must be to speak to the varieties, spectrums, and delineations, in order to name what is invisible or embedded. This not only requires careful research; it also requires attention to how such research might be understood when put to print.

Conflation of complexities like race, power, politics, and the epistemologies and hermeneutics that build or destroy all knowledges defy simplistic explanations. To talk about Adventist apocalypticism, Adventists and politics, the political history of the Adventist Church, the rise of Fundamentalism, Adventist Evangelicalism, Adventism as an American religion, or the colonialist frame of the mission movement is an enormous task. The missional frame can be narcissistic, masking a drive to global religious hegemony. The complexities increase as I seek to be self-reflectively appreciative in recognizing the “goods” that were pursued, intended, or realized.

This chapter seeks to name the places of resistance, complexify them, and give them clarity. How is it so much good work over so many years has been done on the subject, and yet

there is so little ecclesiological interest in saving the planet? What risks have scholars doing the fine work just reviewed taken? Why is the obvious so difficult to pursue?

Adventist Religious DNA²⁷⁰

Protestant identity has historically proven schismatic, first in Europe, then to an even greater extent in the American context. When there is disagreement on doctrine or praxis, the pattern has been to form a separate denominational organization, or at least a parasitic one. Reform has not often worked out, historically speaking. Powers and institutions are remarkably resistant to change, and often more eager for the chance to be protectors of the faith, a feat easily accomplished by identifying heterodoxies as heresies. Resolution denied yields separatism leading to denominationalism.

Adventists identify as Protestants, spiritual descendants of brave souls who stood up to Rome. These descendants fought abuses of power, authority derived from extra-biblical traditions, reasserted the authority of the Bible, and challenged conventional thought as to who had the right to read and interpret the Bible. Adventists see themselves as reformers of the reformed. Schism is embedded behavioral coding, responsive to perceived abuses of power.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was born of odd pairings of Protestant denominations with significantly different points of view: Methodists, Baptists, Seventh-day Baptists, and the outlier, the Christian Connection movement—strongly anti-creedal, anti-institutional, and anti-Trinitarian. Looking at the DNA of these communions, it is not difficult to trace current conflicts in Adventism or the etiology of extant Adventisms. Additionally, Adventism arose from Millerism, then a multi-denominational movement focused on the prophecies of Daniel and

²⁷⁰ “DNA” is being used here in the same way the academic fields of business and education use the term in reference to institutions. There’s also an underlying quasi-Foucaultian sense of genealogy particularly as relates to discourse and the dimensionality of history.

Revelation and the soon-to-occur denouement of human history on October 22, 1844. Separatism and Apocalypticism are at the very heart of Adventist DNA. Progress is met with regression; reform is met with entrenchment. Adventisms continue to multiply.

Adventism's Euro-American DNA and Emergent Whiteness

The Adventist Church founded in 1863 that merged from the ashes of Millerism resembled the northern New England citizenry it was born of—American²⁷¹ people of European ancestry. A quick survey of the photos from the period confirms the same. The surnames of the founders are Anglo-Saxon, English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Norse, and French, and they show strongly in mid-1800's records in New York.²⁷² This background fits with the history of the Millerite movement, which grew out of the “burned-over district” of Western New York. Church prophetess and co-founder Ellen Gould Harmon White's ancestry has twice been charted by the White Estate, revealing that her family was of Anglo-Saxon heritage and came from England to New England in 1635.²⁷³

Given the Anglo-Saxon background of Ellen G. White and many other founders, it is important to note that the socio-political-economic construct and anthropological phenomenon of “Whiteness” was not spelled out as such at the time of the church's founding. Even when not explicit, “Whiteness” eventually became a new melded identification built on skin color and a culture of dominance and privilege. Non-Whites, Black slaves and freemen, Native Americans, immigrant Jews, Spaniards, Italians, and Greeks were all otherized culturally and politically by

²⁷¹ Here I use “American” not as a geographic identification, but in the Americocentric manner so common in the United States of America.

²⁷² See the name mapping feature in Ancestry.com., <https://www.ancestry.com/name-origin?surname=map>,

²⁷³ The Ellen G. White Estate, “The Genealogy of Ellen G. White: An Update,” Ellen G. White Estate, April 2003, <https://whiteestate.org/legacy/issues-genealogy-html/>.

the dominant White's as "persons of color." While early Adventist witness on the question of slavery is generally something to be proud of, subsequent historical acquiescence to Jim Crow laws and thinking led to the sin of segregation in the church.

Whiteness as a normative phenomenon embodies racism, sexism, genderism, capitalism, and violence as a means of suppression and unequal enforcement of the law. As an American construct, Whiteness has expressed itself through the colonizing of lands and indigenous peoples. More often (and just as insidiously), it manifests through science, invention, technology, medicine, culture, media, and global business/economic interests. Adventism is inescapably woven into this frame. Further, it is important to name the ways in which Whiteness is also an ecological problem and to deconstruct complicity to make space for "other," particularly if that "other" is the environment.

As has been noted, a connection exists between America as an economic, cultural, and religious colonizer and the rise of Adventism as an American Christian sect with global missiological ambitions. These missional ambitions have largely been undifferentiated from the American doctrine of "Manifest Destiny," with its accompanying economics of prosperity, cultural hegemony, social-linguistic literate normativity, and technological superiority. Embedded in Adventist DNA is an expansionist and consumerist sensibility resistant to the core ecologic ideal that less is more, and resonant with neoliberal capitalism. Christian virtues of simplicity and modesty have been overcome by capitalism's insistence on defining humans as consumers.

Adventists and Politics: Biblical and Theological Considerations

There is no one Adventist political theology, and I suspect the options might play out along the lines of Adventisms identified in the opening chapter of this dissertation. In a very

truncated survey of scripture, Adventists would likely cite the end of the theocracy in Israel with the request for a king (1 Samuel 8:8-10). Daniel 2:21 is often quoted, and reads, God “deposes kings and raises up others” (NIV), seemingly placing political outcomes in the frame of God’s action and will. Along similar lines, Romans 13:1-6 is read as admonishing respect for the state, a perspective in keeping with Evangelical modes of thinking. God’s sovereignty becomes cover for personal responsibility, despite contemporary democratic systems allowing for voice and unprecedented agency. As Roger Dudley and Edwin Hernandez note, Adventists “tend to avoid socio-political questions, believing that ‘our kingdom is not of this world.’”²⁷⁴

Theologically speaking, the nature of the Kingdom of God is popularly understood to be primarily eschatological and apolitical. God’s rule is not about a political or party affiliation, liberal or conservative. Human foibles, the lust for power, hawkishness, greed, dishonesty, misuse of resources, violation of human rights, the breaking and bending of laws, *quid pro quo* deals, moral turpitude, cruelty, selfishness, scandal, abuse, etcetera, are not understood to be proprietary or partisan.

Even so, elsewhere in scripture, prophets dare to confront kings. A truly Bible-based church must also be prophetic, speaking truth to power. Doing so requires rigor in analysis and unflinching dedication to truth in fact. It requires clarity of conviction. It invites risk.

Adventists affirm God as Creator, as One who acts as the social unity that is Trinity, creating “all that is” (Colossians 1:16, NIV) and adjudicating creation itself as “good” (Genesis 1, 2). Adventism, however, contains a profound disconnect and dissonance between these

²⁷⁴ Roger L. Dudley and Edwin I. Hernandez, *Citizens of Two Worlds: Religion and Politics Among American Seventh-day Adventists* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1992).

confessional statements and the lack of traction and momentum around efforts to support ecological thinking or develop a comprehensive ecotheology in the midst of calamitous happenings. I cannot reconcile, on the one hand, conservative, Fundamentalist Adventist theology of creation with an insistence on a young-Earth timeframe for Genesis as well as a literal seven-day creation cycle with the Seventh-day Sabbath as its ultimate conclusion *and* on the other, reluctance to formulate and embrace a comprehensive ecotheology affirming creation itself and valuing it with action. The answer lies through a more complex analysis of the historical and political realities, yet outside of academia, scripture is not generally read through political lenses.

Adventists and Politics: The Virtue of Silence

Adventists tend not to talk politics, not publicly anyway. The divisive nature of the topic encourages a silence meant to avoid conflict.²⁷⁵ The official church position on church-state relations says, “Adventists should not ... become preoccupied with politics, or utilize the pulpit or our publications to advance political theories.”²⁷⁶ Indeed, Church co-founder and prophetess Ellen G. White wrote, “The Lord would have his people bury political questions. On these themes silence is eloquence. Christ calls upon His followers to come into unity on the pure gospel principles which are plainly revealed in the word of God.”²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Social media has shifted this, but at least on Facebook, one finds a battle of soundbites and sources, not a real discussion around the kind of world we would like to inhabit or a vision for a common future.

²⁷⁶ “Church-State Relations” (Seventh-day Adventist Church, March 1, 2002), <https://www.adventist.org/articles/church-state-relations/>. In this statement, “theories” references the subjective singular personal opinion, not political theory *per se*.

²⁷⁷ Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), 475.

The net effect with regard to politics tends to be disdain. Politically interested, active, engaged people are seen as tainted by the demands of inevitable compromise and are suspect at some deep level. Adventists who are politically engaged may find themselves falsely accused of favoring human solutions, solutions adjudicated to be and dismissed as temporal and inadequate. The point is the divine solution—salvation by faith through grace as mediated by Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. He who will return in glory and make a “new heaven and earth” (Revelation 21:1). Proclamation of these ultimate and eternal truths is endorsed as that which should occupy the church.

Adventists and Politics: The Anti-Establishment Clause

Adventists are historically strong proponents of the separation of church and state, a doctrine arising from the Anti-Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, because of being a minority sect among Christians. In addition, Adventists support separation because of fear dominance of Catholicity; fear that ecumenical unions that might drive public policies in religious directions not compatible with tenets of faith (such as Sunday Laws); state interventions vis-à-vis undue taxation, or the erosion of the right to protect institutional integrity through sex, gender, and other performances of discrimination, as well as ecclesiological, religious, political, and financial autonomy.

Because separation of church and state is a high value, political endorsements are simply not given.²⁷⁸ When Adventist Dr. Ben Carson announced his candidacy for President of the United States of America in the 2016 election cycle, the *Adventist Review* published this statement: “The Adventist Church has a longstanding position of not supporting or opposing any

²⁷⁸ Dr. Ben Carson ran for President of the U.S. without endorsement from the Adventist Church in 2016.

candidate for elected office. This position is based both on our historical position of separation of church and state and the applicable federal law relating to the church's tax-exempt status."²⁷⁹ In professional practice, pastors are not to preach politics or publicly endorse parties, platforms, candidates, or measures.²⁸⁰ Even so, occasionally issues arise around which action is encouraged.²⁸¹ Dudley and Hernandez correctly identify these as focused on preserving the institution by maintaining autonomy and control.²⁸²

Separation of church and state notwithstanding, if the church is to function as a credible witness in the lived world, it must engage the lived world. The world of American politics, increasingly fraught with misinformation of all kinds, is part of that world. Political avoidance raises the question of relevance. Escapism is for the childish.

Adventists and Politics: Social & Environmental Justice as "Political Subjects"

This does not mean Adventists do not think politically or are not affected by local, state, national, and global politics. To the contrary, Adventists are already politicized and polarized around subjects such as climate change, ecology, etc. The net effect is an inability to critically

²⁷⁹ Adventist Review, "Adventist Church in North America Issues Statement on Ben Carson's U.S. Presidential Bid," May 4, 2015, <https://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story2602-adventist-church-in-north-america-issues-statement-on-ben-carsons-u.s.-presidential-bid>.

²⁸⁰ Adventist Review, "Statement on Ben Carson's Presidential Bid." The exception might be African American Adventist congregations, where local and state politicians are more likely to be guests and speakers.

²⁸¹ There were many Adventists mobilized around California Proposition 8 in 2008, the "California Marriage Protection Act." Fears were that religious exemption allowing discrimination against homosexuals in the hiring pastors, teachers and administrators would be revoked. See Church State Council: A Religious Liberty Ministry of the Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "Church State Council Supports the California Marriage Amendment," accessed September 23, 2020, <https://www.churchstate.org/index.php?id=444>.

²⁸² Dudley and Hernandez, *Citizens of Two Worlds*, 28.

address significant social trends and changes in the ethos of the church. As Loren Siebold observes:

Some Seventh-day Adventists in America now define good Christian citizenry by evangelical, Republican and libertarian talking points. Noncombatancy, a teaching rooted in our historical respect for the ten commandments, has in the United States succumbed to a Christian-scented patriotism. We used to say that should our institutions take public money our mission could be compromised. Not anymore. If there were a crisis that led to the religious rights of Muslims being suspended to maintain law, order, and safety (something many Christian conservatives already favor), I fear even religious liberty might become too controversial for us to discuss comfortably.²⁸³

While Siebold problematizes these shifts (and I concur with him), the rendering of issues that ought to be of interest as a course of faith becomes taboo as a subject of politics.

In a pithy and insightful chapter of the *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and Climate Change*, Willis Jenkins names the United States a “corrupting political context for Christian theology,”²⁸⁴ noting that “US theological engagements with the politics of climate change have followed paths so divergent that it is no longer clear how they can all belong to the same confession of faith.”²⁸⁵ This is consonant with my views and with the devolution of traditional and evangelical Adventisms as I understand them. Although I agree that America is a “corrupting context,” somehow, being a Christian also ought to be confessional in the fullest sense of the word—it should be world-shaping in the direction of restoration and resilience.

As Willis Jenkins observes, even where there is willingness to discuss issues with political implications, an ecotheology that cannot or will not politically interpret the structures

²⁸³ Seibold, “Why Adventists Can’t Talk Politics.”

²⁸⁴ Willis Jenkins, “Working with Politics,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and Climate Change*, ed. Ernest R. Conradie and Hilda P. Koster, 1st ed. (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 70.

²⁸⁵ Jenkins, “Working with Politics,” 70.

and relationships informing such a theology in the wider spectrum of North Atlantic Christian theological discourse may “weaken, rather than bolster, political capacities to respond well.”²⁸⁶ The political question is highly complex. Thoughts and actions, both corporate and individual, have political ramifications. For purposes of this paper, I assume that politics stands as the ubiquitous factor, whatever the lens.

Seibold, as we saw, argues that Adventists *can't* talk politics. Adventists are “unable to converse, and are terrified of dissent.”²⁸⁷ Adventists *can* talk politics as implicated in prophecy (Sunday Laws, or issues affecting the “Establishment Clause,” for example), but he notes that Adventists tend to “choose as religious priorities [in] the distant future over the immediate, the ideological over the personal, the abstract over the concrete, (and) the possible but unlikely over a genuine crisis.”²⁸⁸

When George Floyd (and all the Black- and Brown-bodied people Floyd represents) was murdered before our eyes; when images of refugees fleeing violence (the same violence the U.S. had a hand in creating) in Central America are shown on the news;²⁸⁹ when the Rohingya suffer ethnic cleansing in Myanmar and are driven out of their lands; when nearly a half-million people

²⁸⁶ Willis Jenkins, “Working With Politics,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and Climate Change*, ed. Ernest R. Conradie and Hilda P. Koster, 1st ed. (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 73.

²⁸⁷ Loren Seibold, “Why Adventists Can’t Talk About Politics,” *AdventistToday.Org.*, April 11, 2019, <https://atoday.org/why-adventists-cant-talk-about-politics/>.

²⁸⁸ Seibold, “Why Adventists Can’t Talk Politics.”

²⁸⁹ Lindsey Abston Painter uses this example to point to the oppression and injustice that stands to indict Americans spiritually and socio-politically. Speaking to injustice may be political, but it is also biblical. See Lindsey Abston Painter, “Why I Reject American Exceptionalism,” *AdventistToday.Org* (blog), July 3, 2019, <https://atoday.org/why-i-reject-american-exceptionalism/>.

and counting have died from COVID-19 in the United States,²⁹⁰ and when climate change is denied and the Earth imperiled by unchecked carbon emissions, the church must speak, even if doing so appears partisan. It is time to recognize the ubiquitous nature of politics, implicated in all we say or do, or do not say or do. The problem is compounded by Adventist failure to recognize “the moral dimensions to most public issues,”²⁹¹ partly because “[t]he privatization of morality is the principle restraint structural pluralism imposes on religion.”²⁹² Ironically, this is partly what White Fundamentalist Evangelicals are pushing back on.

Seibold further notes, “Seventh-day Adventists have filtered all our political concerns through eschatology, avoiding other political discussions. And here is what we have lost: the understanding that social justice ought to be as much a part of our political awareness as is religious liberty.”²⁹³ As there is no engagement with the moral questions of our time, Seibold suggests perhaps, in light of the political concerns embedded in the biblical prophets and notions of justice, perhaps Adventists ought to dare to “take a collective interest in politics.”²⁹⁴

Dudley and Hernandez identify related and important ideas around why morality almost never overrides political silence in the Adventist Church and other denominations like it. First, modernity represented rationalistic explanations, the expansion of subcultures and pluralistic views, and the “dichotomization of life into public and private spheres.”²⁹⁵ This forced religion

²⁹⁰ As of March 25, 2021, according to the CDC, the COVID-19 death toll in the United States is 542,584. See “COVID Data Tracker,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 23, 2021, <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home>

²⁹¹ Dudley and Hernandez, *Citizens of Two Worlds*, 4.

²⁹² Dudley and Hernandez, *Citizens of Two Worlds*, 24.

²⁹³ Seibold, “Why Adventists Can’t Talk Politics.”

²⁹⁴ Seibold, “Why Adventists Can’t Talk Politics.”

²⁹⁵ Roger L. Dudley and Edwin I. Hernandez, *Citizens of Two Worlds: Religion and Politics Among America Seventh-day Adventists* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1992), 23.

out of public life. The second factor was the rise of individualism, theologically embracing Methodist pietism and dispensationalism.²⁹⁶ These factors lead to what Dudley and Hernandez term the “great fallacy”: Adventist “morality has become almost exclusively personal and private instead of also being social and public.”²⁹⁷ This insight also carries tremendous explanatory power. When morality is personal, relative, and private, a church as a social entity, no matter the theology, will struggle to move people to corporate action. This is another challenge that somehow, must be overcome.

The Adventist Church must decide in such cases if political neutrality is possible when so much is at stake socially and ethically. Either way, the subject of politics and the politicization of “climate change” and other concepts and terms used to describe the currently unsustainable environmental trajectory are, at present, a significant barrier to any traction around a viable Adventist ecotheology.

If apocalypticism is the primary *theological* barrier to creation care, political polarization is the primary social and ecclesiological barrier. Climate change cannot productively be discussed in church life because, *de facto*, it is a political issue and therefore divisive. Politicization shifts discourse away from the potency of fact and the predictive powers of science. It stymies discussion of the moral, theological, and spiritual implications of the crisis before us and how we as people of faith ought to live in light of it.

Adventists, Ecology, and the Rise of Fundamentalism

Confirmation that the Adventist Church has been moving to the right theologically and politically has been found in a variety of places. The struggle among church intellectuals and

²⁹⁶ Dudley and Hernandez, *Citizens of Two Worlds*, 28.

²⁹⁷ Dudley and Hernandez, *Citizens of Two Worlds*, 235.

leaders in the 1919 Bible Conference as they wrestled with Fundamentalism (itself attractive as a way to combat modernism and evolutionary theory or science) served as an important tipping point.²⁹⁸ Further, seeking acceptance with conservative Protestants and Evangelicals through the 1950s led to publication of the seminal 1957 Evangelical Adventist work, *Questions on Doctrine*,²⁹⁹ which made clear the Adventist stance on inspiration (scripture first, above Ellen White) in response to questions raised by Evangelical thinkers like Walter Martin. The journey to publication of Walter Martin's *The Kingdom of the Cults* led to a large appendix on Adventists as *sectarian*, not *cultic*, based on an elevated view of scripture, an orthodox framing of Trinity, an evangelical understanding of the nature of Christ, and righteousness by faith.

In 1990, Neal Wilson (father to Ted Wilson, current GC President) lost the nomination for another term. The then-editor of the *Adventist Review*, Bill Johnsson, noted, “Wilson confronted a series of major problems—challenges to Adventist understanding of prophecy and the heavenly sanctuary, and to Ellen White’s writings; the financial crisis in the Davenport investments and the bankruptcy of Harris Pine Mill.”³⁰⁰ Johnsson politely references scandal, first the Ford crisis, then Walter Rea’s *The White Lie*, the humiliation of the Davenport affair (Ponzi scheme), and the loss of a major employer at all Adventist boarding schools. It was too much.

²⁹⁸ See Michael Campbell, *1919: The Untold Story of Adventism’s Struggle with Fundamentalism* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2019).

²⁹⁹ Le Roy Edwin Froom, Walter E. Read, and Roy Allen Anderson, *Seventh-Day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957). This book has proved highly controversial over the years. Many have felt it was not balanced and de-emphasized more unique doctrinal understandings such as the Sanctuary Doctrine that gave rise to the formation of the Church in the first place. In short, historic Adventists have the most difficulty with it.

³⁰⁰ William G. Johnsson, “Neal C. Wilson – Church Statesman,” *Adventist Review* 167, no. 28 (July 8, 1990): 4.

The election of Robert Falkenberg as GC President that year brought a more sectarian and conservative leadership, in a continuation of internal fundamentalist movements afoot. The moment also served as the Adventist correlate to the 1986 Fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention, though not recognized officially as such.

In academic circles, the formation of the Adventist Theological Society (ATS) in 1988 and its mouthpiece, the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* (JATS)³⁰¹ built on commonly shared “hermeneutical presuppositions of Bible-believing Adventism” seeking to support “doctrines under attack,”³⁰² namely,

Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice; the authority of Scripture; rejection of all hermeneutical methods – including the historical-critical method – that undermined *Sola Scriptura*; the role and authority of the Spirit of Prophecy; the literal reading of Genesis 1-11; the biblical teaching on the heavenly sanctuary and the pre-advent investigative judgment beginning in 1844; identification of the SDA Church as the remnant movement called to proclaim the three angels’ messages to prepare the world for the soon and literal return of Christ; and faithfulness to the SDA Church, by supporting it through personal effort and influence, as well as tithes and offerings.³⁰³

The second and third items “under attack” dealt with the question of scriptural authority and the rejection of all hermeneutics undermining the principle of the Bible as its own interpreter. Many Adventist interpretive and theological issues arise from the war around “fidelity” to God’s word, the hermeneutics of interpretation. (Note that “the literal reading of Genesis 1-11” and the “soon and literal return of Christ” are among the key issues.)

³⁰¹ Undoubtedly an emulation of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) and the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (JETS).

³⁰² Richard Davidson, “The Story Behind the ATS: A Personal Reflection,” Adventist Theological Society, 1996, <https://www.atsjats.org/about/history-of-ats>.

³⁰³ Davidson, “The Story Behind the ATS.” Davidson quotes the preamble to the ATS Constitution.

The ATS is a “by invitation only” organization requiring an annual signing of a pledge of loyalty. Key figures in the organization’s history have included Jack Blanco, who paraphrased and published the first “Adventist Bible” (*The Clear Word Bible*)³⁰⁴; Gerhard Hasel, former Dean of the Seminary at Andrews University; and Ed Zinke, an entrepreneur who has managed to capitalize on his wife’s businesses success (Ann’s House of Nuts) and his own highly conservative theological interests to significant influence.³⁰⁵ Zinke notes “theology often has been based on philosophy such as that of Plato in fourth-century BC Greece, when in fact it and all academic disciplines should be based on the Bible.”³⁰⁶ This approach is of concern, because it understands systematic theology, by definition, to be unbiblical.

The problem remains epistemologies, privileging, and hermeneutics. The primary epistemology Zinke is concerned with is authority, namely the authority of scripture. Reason secondarily gets to apprehend scripture, yielding to faith where necessary. The historical-textual method limits hermeneutic frames that might otherwise yield ecologic material apart from Kavusa’s reading of recovery.

Fundamentalist Epistemologies and Hermeneutics

Epistemologies, metaphysics, and apocalypticism in Evangelical Fundamentalist thinking operate in a strange circular logic beginning with the long and historic war about the biblical text. This is primarily a war of ontology, epistemology, and hermeneutics. Fundamentalists,³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ Historically, no Adventist would have endorsed such a project. Any version acceptable to Protestant denominations, done by a committee of qualified scholars would have been ideal.

³⁰⁵ See Andrew McChesney, “Edward Zinke Is on a Mission to Point Adventist Educators to the Bible,” *Adventist Review*, August 15, 2016, <https://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story4219-edward-zinke-is-on-a-mission-to-point-adventist-educators-to-the-bible>.

³⁰⁶ McChesney, “Zinke Is on a Mission.”

³⁰⁷ Here I am primarily referencing conservative, historical, and evangelical Adventists. Progressive Adventists are most clearly identified hermeneutically.

the answer to the question “What is the Bible?” is “the Word of God.” The answer drives the primacy of the divine origination and proofs of veracity in relation to the text and the unparalleled authority it is given.

I see this as driven by an uncritical (if not ahistorical) understanding, namely, that to question the Bible is to question the God who blessed us with it. The fear is that treating the word of God critically means treating it unfaithfully. This, of course, gives an inadequate account of the oral traditions preceding and contemporary to the written text; ancient near-Eastern and other mythologies; cults of sacrifice; court documents/records from many governments and eras covered by the biblical text; Hebrew poetry and hymnody; and the syncretism that arose from the cultural interactions and religious confluences of the ancient world. Just as importantly, this understanding also excludes contemporary hermeneutical frames, such as feminism or the environment.

For the Fundamentalist, the sacred text is the word of God in the language of humans. Divine participation vis-à-vis inspiration of the Holy Spirit on men³⁰⁸ (see 2 Peter 1:21) tempts a confusion of ontological status and metaphysical truth with the hermeneutical task of understanding “inspiration” epistemologically. The Fundamentalist project centers around what is true/True, through the lens of literalism. This approach reasons that if the Bible is factually, literally, historically true, then the likelihood of its supernatural claims being true is reliably high. It then becomes an infallible and inerrant guide. Factual verification of the details of text imbued with divine inspiration leads to a false, almost metaphysical status of the word, even

³⁰⁸ The KJV and many other versions render this “Holy men,” though there is only one Ἁγίου, which clearly modifies Πνεύματος. Most contemporary translations apply “Holy” to the Spirit.

though that itself borders on blasphemy. For only God (“the Word made flesh”) is ultimately True.

Tremendous efforts have gone into proving the Bible true through archeological confirmation of the histories in the biblical record. This effort is driven by the Fundamentalist impulse to maintain an elevated status for the Bible by maintaining its infallibility and inerrancy. It highlights the attributions of God in sourcing biblical inspiration while downplaying the human experience and human contributions to the text. From this perspective, to take scripture seriously is to take it as God's word, *as is*.

Thus, the authority of the Bible is ontologically asserted and rendered as if ultimately true. What is prophesied to be (the eschaton) is as certain as what has been, however logically problematic this may be, because God's word is *true*. The nature, position, role, authority, and surety of scripture are based on ahistoric perspectives asserted without acknowledgment of the narrative forms or intuitive and authoritative epistemologies.

Indeed, the history, status, meaning or interpretation of scripture as written text is complex! First, it is a cultural problem formed out of an elitist, racist, Eurocentric elevation of the written word over oral and other lived traditions, and it includes the colonizing effects of the mission-driven globalization of Christian religion with its concomitant transport of culture. Second, many questions relevant to ecology have become a political (tribalist) issue superseding religious knowledge or loyalties. Third, immaturity is evidenced based in denial of the ways our wants and needs fail the Earth (where Earth stewardship is concerned), and in which modes of exploitation and consumption are considered essential for human well-being. Fourth, as a theological problem, it is exacerbated by Fundamentalist hermeneutical limitations and a particularly glaring failure to understand the problem of textual privileging, meaning what within

sacred writ one is willing to assign significance or application to. Fifth and finally, the problem is rooted in philosophical mistakes, among these the false reasoning that allows what is future (the second coming of Jesus) to function in an atemporal way as if present (or past) in a religious culture that understands revelation as unfolding through time.

Evangelical/Fundamentalist Points of Resistance

Though the Adventist Church was once politically and socially engaged,³⁰⁹ the church is now quite divided. Much of the Adventist response (or lack thereof) to the ecological crisis has been shaped by Evangelical, Fundamentalist thinking.^{310, 311} As Fundamentalist Evangelicals in so many respects,³¹² Adventists followed a distinctly American pattern of conservative Christian development, including reactive to modernity and Darwinism.³¹³ To wit from Kavusa:

“Environmentalism is ... rejected for its criticism character, which is associated with secularism,

³⁰⁹ At least since the late 1800s, when we were part of the anti-slavery, temperance, and dress reform movements.

³¹⁰ To give a classic example: blogger Andy Roman writes: “There’s nothing wrong with being good stewards of God’s creation, but saving the planet is not the new morality. The real issues facing our world is the disintegration of God’s moral, 10 Commandment law. The slaughter of the unborn, the destruction of the one man and one woman marriage arrangement, the reversal of the gender roles by a godless society and the collapse of the family – these are defacing the image of God and corruption the principle of His moral law.” See “Seventh-day Adventists Join the Eco Revolution by hosting an Earth Day Summit Event,” *Advent Messenger* (blog), April 27, 2019, <http://adventmessenger.org/seventh-day-adventists-join-the-eco-revolution-by-hosting-a-earth-day-summit-event/>. This is *not* historic Adventism, but conservative fundamentalist evangelicalism.

³¹¹ Evangelical/Fundamentalist arguments were both formed and forming as Adventist theologians, scientists, educators, pastors, and thinkers began to engage the issues.

³¹² Some might argue the Adventist view of scriptures as inspired in ways that yield infallibility, not inerrancy, to be a departure point from hard-core Fundamentalism.

³¹³ Michael Campbell, “The Adventist Struggle with Fundamentalism: Centennial Reflections on the 1919 Bible Conference,” Lecture, Pastoral Conference, School of Religion, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, CA, September 23, 2019.

and therefore a mask of Satan.”³¹⁴

The larger cultural and conservative Protestant Evangelical Fundamentalist contexts imply that whatever moves these groups will also move Adventists. As Evangelicals of the Fundamentalist variety, Adventists are among the population most likely to deny anthropogenic climate change, and most likely to fit the anti-green triumvirate of “conservative theology, disproportionate affiliation with the Republican Party, and to a lesser extent, high levels of church attendance.”³¹⁵ Therefore, the first and perhaps most obvious seat of resistance is Fundamentalist Evangelicalism as it characterizes conservative Adventist thinking.

Related to Fundamentalism is the rejection of the epistemic elevation of science (naturalism and scientism) above revelation based largely on the creation/evolution split. The more virulent “anti-science” Fundamentalist tendency is a variant, on which is also situated squarely within the Fundamentalist rejection of modernism.³¹⁶ For those with an antipathy to science, there is an insecurity or confusion about the veracity of the science, the “supposed ‘facts.’”³¹⁷ Or as one critic put it, “The scientific consensus of one generation can become myths

³¹⁴ Kavitsi J. Kavusa, “Ecological Hermeneutics and the Interpretation of Biblical Texts Yesterday, Today and Onwards: Critical Reflection and Assessment,” *Old Testament Essays* 32, no. 1 (2019): 242.

³¹⁵ Philip Schwadel and Erik Johnson, “The Religious and Political Origins of Evangelical Protestants’ Opposition to Environmental Spending,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56, no. 1 (2017): 180. Adventist theologians and other writers I have encountered in this quest generally stress God’s sovereignty; acknowledge the “dominion” model in Genesis, which plays out as not only anthropocentric, but androcentric (though often to try to reframe it within the stewardship frame); and exegesis varies in quality.

³¹⁶ Campbell, “Adventist Struggle,” Lecture, September 23, 2019.

³¹⁷ Brad Watson, Murray House, and Graham Stacey. “Crisis or Opportunity? Adventist Pastors Speak on Creation Stewardship,” *Ministry: International Journal for Pastors* 81, no. 10 (October 2009): 26.

to another.”³¹⁸ Supernaturalism becomes the explanation of choice for naturalism, and it manifests in questions such as, What of the lordship of the Creator? God’s promises? How are we to “understand today the blessings and curses of the Mosaic covenant as they relate to weather? (Deut. 28:23, 24).”³¹⁹

The polarizing nature of the present political landscape and the perception of environmentalism as a “liberal” political project relates to the fear that the environmental issue itself is politically divisive,³²⁰ as discussed in detail already. There are perceived dangers of political solutions,³²¹ and there is a real fear of backlash for pastors with “conservative” churches.³²²

Perceptions of environmentalism/the green movement/Gaia-Earth as “Mother”/as “new age” pose additional challenges. Ecology is framed as idolatry, which in this context means valuing, worshipping, or serving creation above Creator, equated with the “pagan preoccupation with nature” (Romans 1:20-25).³²³ This concern includes an unequivocal rejection of pantheism

³¹⁸ Betty Marsden, “Ecological Sin: The Morality of an Ecological Breakdown,” *Liberty Magazine*, April 2016, accessed November 17, 2019, <http://libertymagazine.org/article/ecological-sin>.

³¹⁹ Patrick A. Travis, “The Environment: Created and Sustained by Whom?,” *Ministry Magazine* (May 2001): 25. While Travis does not go so far as to try to limit our understandings *exclusively* to scripture, his fundamentalist approach and appeals to biblical authority amount to an *argumentum ad verecundiam*, as there are clearly other sources of reliable information on the environmental challenge and response outside the Bible.

³²⁰ Travis, “The Environment,” 25-26.

³²¹ Travis argues that it is “difficult to maintain the integrity of a legitimate Christian worldview while working from a strictly political perspective.” He doesn’t say how this is so. See also Michael F. Younker, “The American Socio-Political Spider Web and the Rise of Global Christianity,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 25, no. 1 (2014): 132–88. Younker argues the genius of Adventist political neutrality.

³²² Watson, House, and Stacey. “Crisis or Opportunity?,” 27.

³²³ Travis, “The Environment,” 25.

and panentheism,³²⁴ which rely on God's oneness with or presence to creation, as opposed to God's transcendence, an ontological otherness setting God apart from creation.

Some worry ecology is not the gospel, the primacy of which must remain in focus. Matters of "faith, belief, and theology" ought to take precedence over environmental concerns,³²⁵ a perspective which connects to the fear of being "sidetracked from the church's mission."³²⁶ For conservative Christian thinkers, this idea further relates to the dangers of slipping into "social justice." Perceived as a primarily liberal Catholic and Mainline Protestant concern, "social justice" is seen as a descent into the pursuit of political, economic, and social answers to problems that conservative Christians prefer to view through notions of biblical justice.³²⁷

Additionally, a religious conflation of Americanism and Christianity (particularly evidenced in Evangelicalism manifesting as Christian nationalism) poses real, highly complex challenges. On the one hand, we find an almost libertarian obsession with autonomy and a fear of a "new solidarity, especially in relations between the developing nations and those that are highly industrialized."³²⁸ It is, on the one hand, about the fear of losing privilege and power as a nation-state, and on the other hand, about fear of dominance by ungodly powers, namely the

³²⁴ Paul Mhlanga, "Stewardship of the Environment: An Adventist Imperative," in *26th International Faith and Learning Seminar* (Loma Linda, CA, 2000), 262-264. See also John Odhiambo Otewa, "Restoration of the Environment: An Adventist Perspective" (Paper, 28th International Seminar on the Integration of Faith and Learning, Babcock University, Ikeja, Nigeria, June 17, 2001), http://circle.adventist.org/files/CD2008/CD1/ict/vol_28/28cc_363-380.pdf.

³²⁵ Watson, House, and Stacey, "Crisis or Opportunity?," 26.

³²⁶ Watson, House, and Stacey, "Crisis or Opportunity?," 27.

³²⁷ Travis, "The Environment," 25.

³²⁸ John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation*, World Day of Peace, January 1, 1990, as cited in Travis, "The Environment," 25.

“potential for the widespread abuse of inappropriate, intrusive power over virtually every aspect of human life when it comes to orchestrated attempts to ‘solve’ this ‘global problem.’”^{329, 330}

Because the ecological problem is so much bigger than one person or even one subculture, solutions to the crisis will likely involve people outside of the Adventist eschatological remnant frame. Ecumenical effort may be required for large-scale environmental initiatives. Some Adventists fear that cross-denominational cooperation will weaken identity; interfere with autonomy; subtly undermine ontological status as “the remnant;” compromise anti-Catholic apocalypticism; and negate Adventism’s core imperative to proclaim God’s sovereignty vis-à-vis Revelation 14:7 as a call primarily to worship the one true God. After all, “If two are not agreed, how can they journey together?” (Amos 3:3, paraphrase mine.) Even the need to drastically cut carbon emissions and to reduce the human energy footprint through well-intentioned National Sunday Laws could be viewed as a renewed Catholic or ecumenical threat worth a fierce fight.

Climate change deniers appeal to the expansiveness and complexity of creation. The universe is too vast! Who can know what is the larger truth of the situation really is? Or if we are actually responsible for global warming, species extinction, and irreparable damage to the environment?³³¹ Yet this line of thinking indicates an *argumentum ad ignorantiam* fallacy.

³²⁹ Again, I think Travis conflates (or tacitly speaks to the conflation) of the American and Adventist frames. To fall outside of personal self-determination *or* divine sovereignty is an unacceptable condition.

³³⁰ Marsden, “Ecological Sin,” notes that “the conservative Heritage Foundation fears that federal government talk about climate change isn’t to protect us, but is ‘to justify taxing, regulating, and controlling us. It’s about making us poorer and less free.’”

³³¹ Travis, “The Environment,” 25.

Conservatives also express resistance is based on the fear of “imbalance” in relationship to environmental protections.³³² One must not take a good thing “too far.”³³³ This absurdity finds voice all too often, for when it comes to protecting water sources or working to preserve an endangered species, what does going “too far” look like? Arbuckle and Konisky found that conservatives were less likely to spend money on environmental causes and favored job preservation over environmental preservation.

Finally, the ecological crisis also faces the force of inertia in that it is easier to just do what we have been doing, going with the flow, and spiritualizing it all as a battle. No one wants to be labeled an “ecofreak.”³³⁴ So much more on this topic has and could be said. The Adventist Church has become Adventisms, the dominant strain of which is Evangelical Adventism,³³⁵ and within this later strain, has morphed into an essentially Fundamentalist faith. The corollary movements in American Evangelicalism and the marriage of Evangelicalism to conservative politics is a significant problem for the development of an Adventist ecotheology, an ecological mindset, and pursuit of eco-praxis.

The current clime is not as it used to be, where the term “conservative” had meaning rooted in its etymology, “to conserve.” More than an etymological analysis is needed to unpack the ways this word has lost meaning politically and perhaps within Adventist circles as well.

Politically, the movement to the “right” has transcended conservative ideals of preservation of

³³² A balance of Earth preservation and destruction isn’t a biblical concern, or a theological issue by my read, but rather an essentially American pragmatic one based on economic (capitalist) values, politics (democratic ideals and the right of the citizen to private ownership and use of land(s).

³³³ Travis, “The Environment,” 26.

³³⁴ Paul Mhlanga, “Stewardship of the Environment: An Adventist Imperative,” in *26th International Faith and Learning Seminar* (Loma Linda, CA, 2000), 252, quoting the term used by Gene Johnson, “Keepers of the Garden,” *Adventist Review* (August 18, 1988), 12.

³³⁵ In the United States, if not globally.

values, traditional party ideals, fiscal responsibility, small government, and separation and limits of powers. Such shifts have been marked by the elevation of talk show entertainments to the status of news, the demotion of scientific fact to mere opinion, and a capitalizing on postmodern sensibilities around relativism in promotion of an alternative reality, which ends up as oddly democratic (though in a populist sense). This shift right has been profoundly elitist, authoritarian, and disconnected from very real and serious issues. Adventism as described in Evangelical Fundamentalist terms has similarly forfeited certain values and understandings as it has moved to the right, mimicking the politics of state in significant ways.

To speak plainly, I have been stunned and confused by what I have mistakenly assumed was a lack of discernment on the part of many Christians, particularly Evangelicals and so many Adventists I know. How could people who claim to know and love Jesus support Donald J. Trump? How could friends of the Creator embrace a President who was and is anti-science and anti-environmental? What's behind the failure to see the former President for the privileged, entitled, inarticulate, ignorant, insecure, insensitive, sexist, bigoted, racist, vain, arrogant, proud, pompous, greedy, vulgar, obfuscating, obstreperous, pathologically dishonest, controlling, power-hungry, amoral, vacuous, detached, soul-less, and unimaginably cruel person I believe he has repeatedly demonstrated himself to be?

How could confessing Christians put their faith in someone whose inner circle is formed of nepotism, who fires anyone wishing to hold him accountable to the law? How could the conservative Christian coalition, those outraged members of the political party that impeached Bill Clinton for lying about receiving oral sex from a White House intern, sign off on a man who bragged about sexual assault and then denied doing so? How could the party of "the moral majority" and "family values" endorse a man now married three times, who even in his current

marriage has been implicated in sexual infidelities? Such votes and endorsements and admiring loyalties and allegiances transcend the heights of cynical hypocrisy. As Siebold more diplomatically notes, “there’s enough there to give pause to any thoughtful Christian person.”³³⁶ I could make no sense of it.

That changed in reading Tad DeLay's book *Against: What Does the White Evangelical Want?* DeLay unpacks “desire,” which offers a powerful way to understand and respond to the questions I seek to answer in this dissertation. Clayton Crockett, who wrote the foreword to the book, estimates that DeLay is “the most effective and accomplished theorist of the critical intersection between psychoanalysis and conservative Christian politics”³³⁷ writing today.

DeLay identifies the things the White Evangelical is “Against,” namely the future, knowledge, sexuality, reality, and society.³³⁸ What will come of White Evangelicalism is uncertain. Future generations are not adhering to the faith as previous ones did.³³⁹ This is true in Adventism in the United States, and Europe, too, where “future” is analyzed against this backdrop of decline and self-generated beleaguerment.

DeLay cites apocalypticism as a major problem for interest in an earthly future. Noting such is not new, he cites Millerism and the “rebranding” of the Millerite movement into Seventh-day Adventism after the “Great Disappointment” of 1844.³⁴⁰ The psychological key is the energy that took the disappointment that the world had not ended and found renewed energy to go

³³⁶ Loren Seibold, “Why Adventists Can’t Talk About Politics,” *AdventistToday.Org*. (blog), April 11, 2019, <https://atoday.org/why-adventists-cant-talk-about-politics/>.

³³⁷ Clayton Crockett, “Foreword,” in *Against: What Does the White Evangelical Want?* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), x.

³³⁸ Tad DeLay, *Against: What Does the White Evangelical Want?* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019).

³³⁹ DeLay, *Against*, 4, 5.

³⁴⁰ DeLay, *Against*, 18, 19.

forward in a much bigger way.³⁴¹ Importantly, this key also verifies the idea suggested herein that the expansionist colonial impulse of Americanism expressed itself in the worldwide proliferation of American Christianity through the mission movement, both in and outside Adventism. Thus, at least in part, apocalypticism was globalized.³⁴²

As Evangelicals who preach the Parousia, Adventists have a credibility problem. How long can a faith group preach with great urgency and fervor the imminent return of Jesus? It has been one hundred seventy-six years since 1844. How many different “current events” can be exploited to demonstrate the immediacy based on interpretation of prophecies that, in all likelihood, were never intended to foretell anything of the world geographically if not temporally beyond which they were written for? Even so, for the Adventists and most Evangelicals, there is no future apart from this eschatological event, and therefore no reason to resist or lament the fact the world is dying.

Perhaps the most positive framing of the way in which DeLay’s “desire” motif might be understood is that desire is disconnected from creation itself, otherworldly. Author and blogger Scott Christiansen, referenced earlier, offers an example of an Adventist who appears to take a perverse pleasure/justification in seeing things get worse, just as prophecy predicts. He is not alone. DeLay’s reading of desire points to the gratification of being right, even if the underlying way of being right involves the utter destruction of a sustainable place to inhabit.

In short, the motif’s triumvirate is this: “The most dangerous faith in the world today is white evangelicalism, the most dangerous organization the Republican party, and the most dangerous arrangement global, neoliberal capitalism. Each gladly amplify the most clearly

³⁴¹ DeLay, *Against*, 19.

³⁴² DeLay, *Against*, 19.

catastrophic threat human civilization has ever faced in climate collapse.”³⁴³ He is right. These three produce a “resonance machine,”³⁴⁴ reinforcing each other at levels and scales that defy intervention.

In addition, three other factors are germane to the core of what challenges Adventists in relationship to the development of an adequate ecotheology and ecological engagement on all levels (including the political). Because these factors are illustrative of the complexities I have named, I will briefly attend to DeLay's thoughts on knowledge, reality, and society.

Nothing could be more important than understanding the ways in which White Evangelicals are “against” knowledge. DeLay carefully traces issue this through Christian alternative histories and conflicts over creation vs. evolution, sex education, and the rise of alternatives to integrated public schools. The issue also underlies racism as he connects rejection of evolution to rejection of the fact that “slavery was the primary cause of the Civil War.”³⁴⁵

In Evangelical and Adventist settings, much attention is given to the alleged ways in which science seeks to speak as a metaphysic, particularly when present theory is presented as scientific fact and/or extrapolated into naturalistic cosmologies. This perspective becomes one of many justifications for homeschooling. This movement is, as DeLay notes, about ideological indoctrination, not the development of critical thinking skills needed to address the crisis at hand.³⁴⁶ Homeschooling and this ideological movement is a major threat to Adventist education, which already sets itself apart on many of the issues DeLay notes.

³⁴³ DeLay, *Against*, 22.

³⁴⁴ DeLay, *Against*, 32-36.

³⁴⁵ DeLay, *Against*, 58.

³⁴⁶ DeLay, *Against*, 73.

Science that yields useful technologies is almost always universally adopted without critical inquiry as to the epistemological underpinnings of the type of knowledge yielding the technology. Such is not the case with science that yields theories at odds with belief. At this level of the ideological, knowledge is political. This uncritical acceptance of technologies based on science while eschewing scientific findings at odds with religious belief is how so many conservative Evangelical Fundamentalists can reject climate change. The scientific experts are wrong. As DeLay notes, “politics is nothing other than ethics and desire writ large. The idea that one could teach philosophy, religion, or ethics without connecting political implications is absurd, but this bland talking point also reiterates the contested purpose of education.”³⁴⁷

DeLay uses martyrdom as an analytical lens, citing revanchism and revisionism, propaganda, television and the loss of faith in media, and the “cuing of white supremacist and authoritarian desire”³⁴⁸ as ways of talking about Evangelical Fundamentalist desire.³⁴⁹ The analysis goes like this:

When you’re powerful, playing the victim justifies aggressiveness ... The white evangelical imagination we are exploring is first of all narcissistic, a type of perverse trait overlaid atop broadly neurotic subjects ... Fundamentalism is the religious form of obsessional neurosis, but its doctrinal content and communicative style is perverse (disavowing constantly what it knows to be true, imagining itself as the object of God’s desire) or melancholic (submissive to punishment for deserved guilt). It wants an authoritarian ruler, but it wants to submit from the position of heir to the throne. To put it all together, the sadism through which this faith ravages the world is the by-product of its unconscious desire to suffer itself. Desire must be constantly invigorated with fantasy, which is why stories of martyrdom are attractive.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁷ DeLay, *Against*, 73.

³⁴⁸ DeLay, *Against*, 123.

³⁴⁹ DeLay, *Against*, 103-126.

³⁵⁰ DeLay, *Against*, 105.

This analysis holds significant insight and direction toward an explanation for why people who claim to love Jesus might support Trump and be so against what is obviously true: we are on the brink—if not well over the brink—of environmental ruin. It explains the fantasy of manifest destiny and God’s favor.

The chapter “Against Society” exposes the core of the issue: “The greatest myth entrenched in the minds of liberals and conservatives alike is that we all share a vision of the common good ... We only need to come to the table, find agreement, and maintain civility while refusing to call anything wicked. We see cruelty and ignore it, preferring only to see misguided benevolence.”³⁵¹ This attitude is rampant in Adventism.³⁵² Assumptions about heaven as a common destiny and shared tenets of faith give no thought to the corrosive attitudes, behaviors, or methods employed in disagreement that fracture churches and void the gospel.

With the rise of the Tea Party and the movement of conservative Republicanism toward both fascism and libertarianism, DeLay notes the Putnam and Campbell survey citing the rise of the “religious nones.”³⁵³ Here, he traces the “omens of hierarchy and contempt built into White Evangelicalism as a political project.”³⁵⁴ Citing the addendum to this study, DeLay noted that in

³⁵¹ DeLay, *Against*, 127.

³⁵² Adventist theologian Alden Thompson’s 2009 book, *Beyond Common Ground: Why Liberals and Conservatives Need Each Other*, advocates for just such a position. The underlying assumption is that we have more in common than in difference, diversity of opinion is necessary, and that Adventists ought to extend acceptance on the basis of mutually assumed sincerity in pursuit of biblical godliness. While I agree with Thompson, I see a tendency in the church to assume good will. There’s a failure to see or name real evil, to discern among spirits, to call out those behaving destructively. The present political clime of heightened polarization in the United States has widened the liberal/conservative gap not only in the nation, but in the church.

³⁵³ Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 572 as cited in DeLay, *Against*, 130. DeLay cites Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010, 572.

³⁵⁴ DeLay, *Against*, 127.

relation to party loyalty and affiliation, identification with the Tea Party agenda was connected to two primary factors: 1) “prior affiliation with the Republican party” and 2) the “desire for theocracy.”³⁵⁵ The “animus” of the Tea Party “later flowed into Trumpism” and we witnessed “how theocracy covered for white nationalism.” This is a nationalism that insists that everything be in the service of the state, therefore “Christianity *must* be American.”

Crockett summarizes what DeLay concludes about Evangelical desire:

The short answer is that they want to destroy us, if us includes anyone who is invested in human flourishing and sustainable life on our planet. This book hits hard at the underbelly of evangelical desire, with its themes of climate denial, white racism, anti-intellectualism, theocratic control of sexuality, and a populism that verges on fascism. The core argument DeLay makes here is that all these desires are not incidental or marginal to what is happening in the world today, but they are at the heart of everything that is occurring, shaping and distorting our reality in profound ways to create an evangelical-resonance machine that we ignore at our peril.”³⁵⁶

These are stunningly strong words, and they present an incredible challenge, given that the level of “desire” is the level at which intervention must take place, aware of the ways in which our own desires “feeds into and sustain”³⁵⁷ their desires. Crockett and DeLay agree, “liberalism will not save us.”³⁵⁸ Even so, DeLay claims this: White Evangelicalism is far and away the most dangerous faith the world has yet known.”³⁵⁹ It's true, “our battle is not of information, but of desire, and we are running out of time. Don't you see the world is burning?”³⁶⁰

What Crockett names above may not be *fully* reflective of Adventist Evangelicalism at this moment in time, but it is reflective of the trajectory. Climate change deniers definitely exist within Adventism, as does everything else DeLay discusses too. DeLay rightly observes that “we

³⁵⁵ DeLay, *Against*, 130.

³⁵⁶ Crockett, “Foreword,” ix–xi.

³⁵⁷ Crockett, “Foreword,” xi.

³⁵⁸ Crockett, “Foreword,” x.

³⁵⁹ DeLay, *Against*, 13.

³⁶⁰ DeLay, *Against*, 162.

will lose the battle for the climate if we persist in believing we are simply engaging different points of view held in good faith.” That phrase, “in good faith” is the liminal space where the naïve hold out in hope.

Summary

This chapter has attempted to describe the “complexity” of the nexus of the rise and formation of Adventism as a White, American Protestant Christian sect with strands of inherited Baptist, Methodist, and Christian Connection elements that are at odds with one another. I have factored in anomalies, such as the development of a small, progressive, originally White (now multicultural), affluent group of highly educated Adventists, creators of Adventist “ghettos” primarily around institutionalized medical work. Adventist evangelistic success occurs mostly with uneducated and poor populations in the developed and developing worlds. I have attempted to succinctly name the colonial frame inherent in the assumptions that energized the Adventist mission movement, though the minority status of White citizens of the United States in the global church today complexifies the colonial question to the extent the subject merits its own dissertation. I have named the historical trends toward Fundamentalism as a reaction or response to modernism (of which Marx, Freud, and Darwin are characteristic), as well as the mid-twentieth century embrace of Evangelicalism as a way to settle the residual question of righteousness by faith left by the 1888 General Conference Session, and the courting of key Evangelicals to change the position of Adventists to that of a Christian sect, rather than a cult.

Additionally, I have cited the Fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention in the late 1980s and the way in which I read the 1990 General Conference Session along the same lines, with a concomitant movement away from important social issues such as

poverty, homelessness, and the environment, specifically.³⁶¹ The denial of gender equality in ministry reflects this movement. I have also suggested that the current direction of the global church under Ted Wilson is a retreat from the gains made by moderates and progressives in the twentieth century, consolidating power around many of the same themes important to White Evangelical Fundamentalists, with emphasis on a literalist biblical hermeneutic and attention to “issues” almost entirely peripheral to the substantial causes of suffering on the planet today.

I have additionally noted the way the current political climate within and outside the church (nationally, even globally) has become increasingly polarized and hostile. This is partially because there remains a naivete that underestimates the current depths of division and the wars being waged on local levels for the soul of the church. Church leaders, and to some extent academics too, affirm the value, legitimacy, importance, and validity of individuals and points of view that are ultimately destructive to the ethos of church community and the salvific objectives of the gospel. They offer no discernment around these insidious sources of destruction. There is, prophetically speaking, a plethora of apocalyptic vision and ironically, a dearth of moral vision capable of transcending the political dividing lines of our times.

This is the gauntlet. These are some of the barriers to the formation and dissemination of an Adventist ecotheology and an Adventist turning toward creation. The political and ecological trajectory is nothing short of disastrous. “Even so, Lord Jesus Come.” (Rev. 22:20 KJV)

³⁶¹ Some may point to the publishing of the four Adventists Statements dealing with the environment, all published during Robert Falkenberg's Presidency of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and argue otherwise. I have demonstrated these statements are watered-down versions of the work that had clearly been done under Neal Wilson's presidency prior to 1990.

Chapter 4 – Theoretical, Pedagogical, and Theological Voices of Hope: Transcending the Barriers to an Adventist Ecotheology and Eco-Praxis

Practical Theological Dialogue Partners

Ecological knowledge, global warming statistical projections, species extinction, environmental and animal ethics, and awareness of the crisis of the Anthropocene have not yielded transformation or anything approximating necessary change in human modes of economy. My first thought as I sought sources that might offer theological ideas compatible with Adventist beliefs was to seek out Evangelicals doing ecotheological work. There can be no doubt Evangelical thinkers like Steven Bouma-Prediger, Jonathan Moo, Robert S. White, A.J. Swoboda (a Pentecostal Evangelical), Howard A. Snyder, and others all do excellent work, offering just such ideas.

The early years of the new millennium saw a vibrant Evangelical movement toward Earth stewardship and creation care. Unfortunately, transformation and necessary change, particularly among Evangelicals, was lost in the larger project of political power and influence in alliance with the Republican Party. This aspect has been particularly true and disastrous in the time of Trump. While this does not negate the positive ecological and ecotheological work done by Evangelical scholars who honestly sought to contribute, it hints that such work has not been as influential or transformational as one might hope. More than just knowledge is needed in the Evangelical and Adventist contexts; a turning toward creation and a new valuation of it are needed as never before.

In light of this, I have privileged several dialogue partners outside of the Evangelical tradition for this dissertation. These guides offer theological possibilities that will work or that may be adapted into an Adventist ecotheology. They elucidate the power of food and foodways,

too, offering not only practical wisdom but also insights as to what theoretical, pedagogical, and moral foundations around which I might build a transformational curriculum.

First among these is the Rev. Dr. Jennifer Ayres, PhD, Assistant Professor of Religious Education at Candler School of Theology and an ordained Presbyterian minister. Ayres earned her PhD from Emory University in the area of Person, Community, and Religious Life, and prior to that from Union Theological Seminary, an MDiv in Christian Education and ThM in History and Theology.³⁶² She is academically located firmly within practical theology and writes from that frame. Her interests in food, food production, foodways, environment, spirituality, and religious education pedagogies are so akin to my own, they put her at the top of my list.

I'm particularly drawn to Ayres as I have observed the rise of an emergent spirituality and sense of religious fervor around food. It may be that I mistake the cultic fanaticism that has arisen around food in the last decade or so for religion! Even so, emergent food movements and dietary trends include veganism, vegetarianism, pescatarianism, raw foods, farm-to-table, organics, paleo, "odd foods," non-GMO, gluten-free, keto and more. High-end restaurants often offer fusion cuisine, blending new sensory sights, flavors, smells, and environments to woo customers, who cultishly follow certain chefs, restaurants, or food movements. Restaurants have become the new temples, synagogues, churches, and community centers. Food has become a major source of entertainment not only in the fine dining world, but through food carts and trucks serving street foods, with cooking and baking shows, and major motion pictures.

I mention this because there is a parallel between Ayres' interests in participating in food as an "ongoing social and religious movement" and what I have both observed and experienced.

³⁶² Jennifer R. Ayres, *Curriculum Vitae*, Candler School of Theology, Emory University Website, https://candler.emory.edu/faculty/profiles/cv-files/ayres-jennifer_cv.pdf, accessed October 16, 2020.

Ayres writes a lot on food and is very aware of how much her subject matters. Food is art (aesthetic) and science, nutrition and extravagance, culture and community, both cyclical and powerfully symbolic. Food is life.

In Ayres's book, *Good Food*, this awareness guides the thick descriptions she offers of the people caught in systems of production, delivery, and consumption of foods. She names the system itself, celebrating those who participate in what she identifies as practices of hope. While not within the scope of my work here, Ayres models the perfect primer for Christian readers on systems of food production, delivery, and consumption and how these impact humans, animals, and the environment at every step of the way. Ayres also carefully describes the challenges involved in moving from individual concerns to multinational ones. The importance of the topic is not limited to the personal, physical, cultural, or sociological aspects. Instead, there are ethical implications for how food is grown, shipped, processed, and consumed.

Ayres helps the reader see that food is complicated. Where do the seeds for foods come from, and are they genetically modified? Is the soil in which they are planted clean? Are the plants raised organically, or with pesticides and petroleum-based fertilizers? Is the food picked when it is ripe, or picked early because of the distances it is expected the food will have to travel? What sort of energy does mass farming require? What sorts of pollutions do mass farms create? Who prepares the soil, plants, waters, weeds, harvests, boxes, and ships our food? Are they being treated ethically and paid fairly? No, food is not simple.

Ayres also writes on eating, theopoetically calling the table "a site for divine encounter."³⁶³ "Sacred meals are agricultural ... relational ... sites of remembering and

³⁶³ Jennifer R. Ayres, *Good Food: Grounded in Practical Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 54.

recommitment, and anticipatory.”³⁶⁴ Inclusive of Eucharist and beyond, she observes that “(w)hen we receive with gratitude food from the earth, prepare it with love and intentionality, and share it with friends and strangers at the table, we open ourselves to God’s transformative presence in the world.”³⁶⁵ Gratitude, love, intention, and openness to sharing with friends and strangers: these are spiritual practices that move beyond the boundaries of politics or apocalyptic theologies, which Ayres references as “otherworldly spiritualities” that have not served us well ecologically.³⁶⁶

Her Eucharistic theology of table ministry and food brings to light the inherent tensions embedded in the ritual, namely that by ingesting the sacred meal, we are partaking of something more.³⁶⁷ Christians affirm their community with God, Christ, and the fellowship of believers. We “receive the gifts of God’s earth that is also often exploited in the production of the fruit and grain that make up the sacred meal.”³⁶⁸

Liturgical churches with weekly Eucharistic rituals may have a practical and theological advantage, but the quarterly Communion practices of Adventists hold untapped theological and ethical resources for both an Adventist ecotheology and for a theologically and environmentally relevant pedagogy. For Seventh-day Adventists, the “Communion Service” is informed by the foot-washing that precedes it, a partial rebaptism for the forgiveness of sins. The body and blood represented in the elements of the Eucharistic feast are for the forgiveness of sins on a global scale, but the focus tends to be individualistic, not corporate, served by deacons, but not received

³⁶⁴ Jennifer R. Ayres, “Liturgy and Food Culture: Introduction,” *Liturgy* 32, no. 2 (2017): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2017.1262594>.

³⁶⁵ Ayres, *Good Food*, 54.

³⁶⁶ Ayres, *Good Food*, 54.

³⁶⁷ For Adventists, this is a symbolic act devoid of either transubstantiation or consubstantiation.

³⁶⁸ Jennifer R. Ayres, “Liturgy and Food Culture,” 1.

from the hands of a mediating cleric. Participation is encouraged, but optional. I find in this praxis significant space in Adventist theolog(ies) of table ministry for a more corporate, universal, and embodied practice that is less about the abstraction or personalization of sin, and more about the ways in which our eating is complicit with the forces exploiting Earth's peoples and resources.

These moves in *Good Food* have an almost homiletical feel. While she does not cite it and may not be aware of it, she moves us through something closely akin to the “Oops to Yeah”³⁶⁹ preaching pattern, beginning with the crisis and ending with places of hope and a blessing. Her work is also vaguely reminiscent in parts of ecological activist Bill McKibben's well-known book, *Eaarth*, first published in 2010.³⁷⁰ Ayres' practical suggestions around small organic farms parceled off of large agribusiness farms, local home and church gardens, and small and decentralized food production practices resonate with McKibben's suggested response to the global warming crisis as he sees it. “Small, not big: dispersed, not centralized.”³⁷¹

The groundedness of this effort does not leave us wondering if there is hope. She utilizes ethnographic tools, mostly narratives, to look at patterns of resistance to the brokenness of food systems in the Christian community. Those places of resistance that may make a difference are clearly identified. Ayres conceptualization of “Creative maladjustment”³⁷² can lead to the

³⁶⁹ “Oops to Yeah” is a homiletical pattern originally developed by Eugene Lowry. It is summarized by Sherman Haywood Cox II, “Preaching Patterns – From Oops to Yeah” in SoulPreaching.com, August 23, 2007, <http://www.soulpreaching.com/preaching-patterns-homiletical-plot>

³⁷⁰ Bill McKibben, *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet* (New York: Times Books, 2010). McKibben spells Earth as “Eaarth” because it's already altered to the extent it will never be Earth again.

³⁷¹ McKibben, *Eaarth*, 120.

³⁷² Ayres, *Good Food*, 164.

embrace of alternatives, and hope in the face of vast and broken systems. The blessings of a Eucharistic feast may yet be ours!

Ayres' work does good practical theology in that it not only moves freely and cyclically between narrative and analysis but between the various aspects of the interests *and* concerns mentioned above. Here, the practical and inevitable socio-political, environmental, and justice-related concerns meet ethical and theological considerations utilizing, among other tools, "mutually critical correlation" theory.³⁷³ Her work is responsively analytical.

In thinking about both the constructive and practical projects of this dissertation, hermeneutics remain critical. In suggesting what she has above, "mutually critical correlation theory," Ayres builds on theological and philosophical traditions at work in practical theology. Essentially, Schleiermacher (father of modern so-called higher-critical methods) takes the field of hermeneutics to a new level and is credited with being a major influence in practical theology. Tillich chronologically follows Schleiermacher, using symbols as that which carry meaning. These symbols, whether objects or rites or words, "speak" to us in a context of both time and space, moving from the source into the present, then immediately past—requiring interpretation that, in the context of theology, speaks to our ultimate concerns.³⁷⁴ Gadamer chronologically follows Tillich; his hermeneutical circle is dialectical, generating new understandings through

³⁷³ Rebecca Chopp, "Practical Theology and Liberation," in *The Promise of Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009) as cited in Ayres, *Good Food*, xi. Here, Ayres credits Rebecca Chopp with the term, "mutually critical correlation," but this is almost certainly from David Tracy's work with John Cobb, Jr., *Talking About God: Doing Theology in the Context of Modern Pluralism*.

³⁷⁴ Charles E. Winquist, "The Development of a Hermeneutical Theology," in *The Transcendental Imagination: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1972), 77–78.

interpretation of details embedded in the dialectic.³⁷⁵ Heidegger, another contemporary of Tillich and Gadamer, posits critical theory, which challenges structures of oppression through social analysis. Don S. Browning builds on all of these philosophers and theologians as he builds his practical theology focused on the critical interpretation of text, with an eye to understanding both the language and the situatedness of that language. He emphasizes interpretation of objects (words) in the context of *what speaks to us* embedded with meanings we will derive, with dialectic, and finally the use of all these to interrogate and dismantle structures of abuse, inequity, and power imbalance all in dialogue with the church.³⁷⁶

Tillich's hermeneutic of the text as an object *speaking to* holds importance here, a critical theory hermeneutic that offers possibilities in eco-consciousness against the oppression of nature. This is also true for Father Dr. David Tracy's mutually critical correlation theory, by which he posits multiple directional possibilities for analysis through hermeneutics of both retrieval and suspicion, what our tradition offers, and the ways in which the present crisis and/or our experience of this crisis interact with historic tenets of faith. While practical theology would suggest that the dialectic is much more relevant and that our praxis and experience ought to inform our theology, most Adventists do not live that way. Adventists accept theology that informs (or authority that informs) their lives unidirectionally. That is not to say that praxis and experience do not unconsciously or naturally shape the way in which people live and experience; it does. It is reflected in not only cultural diversity but also diversity within families and individuals with Adventisms.

³⁷⁵ Jeff Malpas, "Hans-Georg Gadamer," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2018 Edition, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/gadamer/>.

³⁷⁶ Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

Ayres is grounded in this dialectic as a practical theologian, relevant both to the question of how we might think of that which comes to us from authority and Scripture, as well as much more importantly, how we interact with it. She also explores how our experience of things that are not even necessarily based on authority might speak, like food! Her pedagogy is reflected in the title of paper, “Learning on the Ground.”³⁷⁷ Clingerman summarizes her pedagogy well, as one “focusing on engagement, embodiment, and ecologically-friendly practices.”³⁷⁸ These pedagogical practices take into account the “personal narratives of the learners, their emotions, and even their bodies ... expand(ing) the boundaries of ‘communities’ to which religious leaders are accountable to include the ecological context.”³⁷⁹

Ayres’ work, while based on clear limitations and objectives, is sophisticated. She is aware that there are legitimate tensions that characterize any approach to problems as complex as food systems, even among Christians, and she consciously attempts to occupy the space between, free then to criticize or affirm realities.

Her clear narrative quickly and effortlessly yields to analysis as Ayres adeptly employs theology, “embodied ecological spirituality,”³⁸⁰ and ethics. Ayres’ embodied theology, in which “growing, sharing and eating food are a means of revelation...reveal(ing) something about the brokenness of humanity, and its social and ecological arrangements,” encapsulates the relationship of food and ecology I hope to incorporate in the *Transformational Small Group*

³⁷⁷ Jennifer R. Ayres, “Learning on the Ground: Ecology, Engagement, and Embodiment,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 17, no. 3 (July 2014): 203–14.

³⁷⁸ Forest Clingerman, “Pedagogy as a Field Guide to the Ecology of the Classroom,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 17, no. 3 (2014): 217–20, <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12203>.

³⁷⁹ Ayres, “Learning on the Ground,” 211.

³⁸⁰ Jennifer R. Ayres, *Good Food: Grounded in Practical Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), x.

Curriculum Pilot Project. There is a clever, subtle humor and genuine wit to her “grounded” theology. This is an important read for this endeavor.

Another way to understand Ayres is as a religious educator. Her “Lives Worth Living” paper deserves mention, particularly as it develops her theoretical foundations and underlying methods well. Consistent with her use of mutual critical correlation theory in *Good Food*, Ayres presses the dynamic interrelationship and dialogue among what is transmitted pedagogically in terms of knowledge, inspiration, challenge as well as praxis, or how participation informs religious identity.³⁸¹ As environmentalism involves social justice (if not constituting a form of it), the lack of an Adventist ecological religious identity despite theological convictions around creation, etc., should be expected. Adventist religious identity remains disembodied, alien to the environment in this sense. It is human engagement and living with environment that needs reconsideration, change.

Ayres draws on some important sources. Practical theologian Craig Dykstra’s work on the transformational effects of engaged practices is³⁸² referenced in relationship to Alasdair MacIntyre’s work on “goods,” some “tangible and external, some intangible and internal.”³⁸³ Her interest is the “formative capacity” of “social movements,”³⁸⁴ which, for the purposes of this project, includes ecological movements. Sociologist James Jasper, who also references

³⁸¹ Ayres, “Lives Worth Living,” 368.

³⁸² Craig Dykstra, “Reconceiving Practice,” in *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education*, ed. Barbara G. Wheeler and Edward Farley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991). 45, as cited in Ayres, “Lives Worth Living,” 369.

³⁸³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 189-190, as cited in Ayres, “Lives Worth Living,” 369.

³⁸⁴ Ayres, “Lives Worth Living,” 370.

MacIntyre,³⁸⁵ notes that activism builds “moral sensitivity, an essential product of social movements, giv[ing] meaning to human life.”³⁸⁶ The implication for this study is that a life of creative engagement with social issues (ecology) is transformative in ways that inform one’s moral and spiritual identity.

Thus far, this paper has asked and explored reasons why ecological knowledge has not been transformational within the Adventist context. Assent to statements of belief has been the primary goal of catechism and evangelism courses. One clue as to why there is little theological engagement with ecology, and why years of writings around creation and creation care have not yielded an *ecological* Adventist consciousness, may have to do with a mistaken confidence in the sole power of knowledge to change lives.

Ayres looks at how a dialogue between “religious education and social movement theory” might shape identity by “nurturing religious and moral formation.”³⁸⁷ While the goal of my work here is not to produce social (environmental) activism *per se*, such a dialogue is certainly applicable to the hermeneutical and pedagogical challenges presented in formulating the curriculum for the *Transformational Small Group Curriculum Pilot Project* (TSGPP). Personal change occurs not just with knowledge, but with participation, engagement, and praxis.

Also significant for this study, Ayres references the Freirean notion of “liberative education.” In *Pedagogies of the Oppressed*, Freire’s method of educating was consciousness-raising through representations of social injustice and experience in encounter with these. Her

³⁸⁵ James Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 210, as cited in Ayres, “Lives Worth Living,” 370.

³⁸⁶ Ayres, “Lives Worth Living,” 370.

³⁸⁷ Jennifer R. Ayres, “Lives Worth Living: Religious Education and Social Movements,” *Religious Education* 108, no. 4 (2013): 367.

mention of Freire is helpful in that those who would free an oppressed subject must employ critical methods of consciousness-raising, allowing confrontation and reflection in dialectic to stand in for the bland factuality of knowledge in the Northern hemisphere.

In another thoughtful short piece targeting theological education, Ayres mediates on the journey to wisdom vis-à-vis religious education. Using David Orr's essay on knowledge, she reflects on the demands for knowledge and production over and against practices of reflection and life balance, including time and space for making the extraordinary ordinary. The necessity of creative space and ordinary time for knowledge stands in stark contrast to our lived lives.³⁸⁸

Orr's work partially explains the phenomenon of why Adventists and others are not as ecologically minded as they might be. "Fast knowledge," like fast food, has supplanted the natural rhythms of learning and living, which, he argues, are necessarily "slow." His critique points to the confusion created by mountains of information without critical tools and time to "separate essential knowledge from that which is trivial or even dangerous."³⁸⁹ Orr problematizes knowledge applied without "compassion and good judgment."³⁹⁰ His insight as to the "character of knowledge creators"³⁹¹ as worthy of attention seems almost prescient in anticipating today's world. Ayres brilliantly uses Orr's work on "slow" vs. "fast knowledge" to suggest that transformational knowledge takes time, implicating the rush to convey information without given space and time to integrate it. Part of the shift toward Earth must include a

³⁸⁸ Jennifer R. Ayres, "Could More Time For Wandering Transform Theological Education?," Education, Seminary, Health & Well-Being, *Faith & Leadership* (blog), June 13, 2017, <https://faithandleadership.com/jennifer-r-ayres-could-more-time-wandering-transform-theological-education>.

³⁸⁹ David W. Orr, "Slow Knowledge," *Conservation Biology* 10, no. 2 (June 1996): 699.

³⁹⁰ David W. Orr, "Slow Knowledge," 701.

³⁹¹ David W. Orr, "Slow Knowledge," 701.

slowing, including slowing our own expectations about the value of fast knowledge, particularly given the need for critical reflection and careful application.

In *Memories of Home*, Ayres speaks to the question of potential hermeneutics of environment by observing the importance of reading the landscape with the same integrity as we do the sacred texts.³⁹² A hermeneutic of place, of locale, becomes essential particularly when theological education is able to take this into account. One of her sources, David Orr, “describes this capacity as 'ecological literacy' ... Others have described it as ecological consciousness and ecological conscience.”³⁹³

Ayres references one of the most famous quotes around the challenge of the “educational mission,” written by Orr: “all education is environmental education.”³⁹⁴ This she connects with Eisner's famous three curricula: “explicit, implicit, and null”³⁹⁵ to point out that the absence of explicit and implicit forms of ecological theological education leaves the student to learn from what is not being taught. Namely, a lack of explicit teaching will imply that situated awareness, attentiveness to place, care, and advocacy must not be important, theologically speaking.³⁹⁶

Pastors as teachers, theological practitioners, and theological actors in the sense of embodying the delivery of theological constructs in practical and tangible ways, have often been formed without ecological consciousness. Ayres wants to tap into the desire students have to

³⁹² Jennifer R. Ayres, “Memories of Home: Theological Education, Place-Based Pedagogy, and Inhabitation,” in *Grounding Education in Environmental Humanities: Exploring Place-Based Pedagogies in the South*, ed. Lucas F. Johnston and Dave Aftandilian, 1st ed., Routledge Research in Higher Education (New York: Routledge, 2019), 50, Kindle.

³⁹³ David W. Orr, “Ecological Literacy,” in *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 85–96, as cited by Ayres, “Memories of Home,” 50, Kindle.

³⁹⁴ Orr, “Ecological Literacy,” as cited by Ayres, “Memories of Home,” 50, Kindle.

³⁹⁵ Elliot Eisner, “The Three Curricula That All Schools Teach,” in *The Educational Imagination* (New York: MacMillan, 1985), 87–107.

³⁹⁶ Ayres, “Memories of Home,” 50, Kindle.

discover themselves “in theological, moral, and social perspective” and to work to heal the “wounds of the world.”³⁹⁷ Specifically, Ayres

Offer[s] a framework for understanding how place-based pedagogical commitments and practices might illumine and respond to the challenge of cultivating ecological conscience in the particular context of theological education, integrating theological and philosophical frameworks of vocation and inhabitance, place-based and critical pedagogical theory, and insights from classroom experience³⁹⁸

These, namely are student narratives delivered via visual media storytelling methods.³⁹⁹

The very title of Ayres’ most recent book, *Inhabittance*, is evocative on a variety of levels. She references the Greek etiology of “household” and the way οἶκος and its variants point to not just the place, but also to how families live together in a place. It is knowledge for inhabiting.⁴⁰⁰ She is the only one I have come across who ties the root of οἶκος to οἰκουμένη, or “oikoumene refer(ring) to the whole ‘inhabited earth’.”⁴⁰¹ From this, of course, comes “ecumenical,” referring to our lives together within the house of Christian tradition.⁴⁰² *Inhabittance* is about place and our sense of how we are to live in relationship both to place and to those who dwell there with us, as well as a larger sense of how we dwell with all humankind and creation. It is *religious* education.

³⁹⁷ Ayres, “Memories of Home,” 51, Kindle.

³⁹⁸ Ayres, “Memories of Home,” 51, Kindle.

³⁹⁹ Ayres, “Memories of Home,” 61-63, Kindle. Ayres’ interests and mine have run parallel. I can only acknowledge that as the established and published theologian, she must be credited for her beautiful and careful work. Ayres grounds her theology in notions of vocation and inhabitance, a place-based ethical space of call and care that resonates on multiple levels. Also part of the methodologies she references in this work, visual media becomes both mode of exploration, and a hermeneutical lens. I took Visual Media Methods at CGU in 2017 and Narrative Pedagogy at CST in 2018; she wrote this work in 2019. As much as I wish the nexus of this things could be demonstrated to be entirely unique to my work, it is wonderful to have someone whose interests so closely parallel my own, who can direct me theoretically and pedagogically. In some ways, the pilot project becomes a test of her published work, even if her was published after I had already done some work in these areas.

⁴⁰⁰ Jennifer R. Ayres, *Inhabittance: Ecological Religious Education* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 9.

⁴⁰¹ Ayres, *Inhabittance*, 133.

⁴⁰² Ayres, *Inhabittance*, 133.

Ayres lays out the implications. What does it mean to be “embedded and implicated in an ecosystem”?⁴⁰³ Socially speaking, how are we part of both “community as well as an ecosystem”? She lays out the theological question:

“From a theological and ethical perspective, the assertion that humans are ecological beings presents a teleological challenge and divine hope: that by participating in God’s work of transforming and renewing the world, humans might become good ecological beings – good inhabitants.”⁴⁰⁴

The question, then, is how? How do we “teach toward now less than ecological conversion—toward a transformation in worldview, in theological knowing, and in daily practice”?⁴⁰⁵ For it is precisely this “ecological conversion”—this turning toward creation that will be vital, both in thinking through what to recommend as constructive tools for an Adventist ecotheology and in terms of the pedagogical goals and methods for the practical project.

Hartman, Sleeth, and Wirzba: Sabbath as an Ecological Concept

Seventh-day Adventists would, I believe, consider themselves champions of the Seventh-day Sabbath, with a sense of lineage going back to Christian groups faithful to the Seventh-day observance through time.⁴⁰⁶ Seventh-day observance came to Adventists through Rachel Oakes, a Seventh-day Baptist. The Seventh-day Sabbath had been kept by followers of the sect known as ἡ ὁδός (“The Way”) during the lifetimes of Jesus and his apostles, and it continued to be kept widely throughout Christendom through the first two centuries of the Common Era.⁴⁰⁷ Some

⁴⁰³ Ayres, *Inhabitanace*, 39.

⁴⁰⁴ Ayres, *Inhabitanace*, 39.

⁴⁰⁵ Ayres, *Inhabitanace*, 39-40.

⁴⁰⁶ This practice is traced in both European cultures of resistance to Rome, like the Waldensians, African Jews, and Sabbatarian Christians. See Charles E. Bradford, *Sabbath Roots: The African Connection* (Barre, Vermont: L. Brown and Sons Printing, Inc., 1999).

⁴⁰⁷ The timing of the move to Sunday is contested. Of the authors I cite, Wirzba and Hartman both give mention to the conflict around this change, and side with those using the argument from silence (the argument is that Sabbath gets little mention in the 1st century CE post-resurrection literature) that there is no reason to think Sunday observance did not happen post-resurrection. Interestingly Wirzba frames the Sabbath to Sunday question in terms of

Christians began observing a Sunday Sabbath early in the second century CE. While Christians did this in order to differentiate themselves from Judaism and distance themselves from Judaizers, Jewish rebels, and both Jewish and Roman persecution, it has often been framed by Adventists as humans seeking to change divine law, or as a compromise with Rome.

In the early fourth century CE, Constantine's adoption of Christianity and the move from Saturday to Sunday observance did serve a syncretistic purpose as Roman paganism yielded to and was accommodated by the new faith. This heightens the sense of lineage referenced above. Adventists feel a kinship with both European and African forms of Sabbatarian Christianity.

Traditional Sabbath-keeping serves both theological and practical functions. Observing the Sabbath as one of the Ten Commandments functions as obedience to the law. Sabbath memorializes God's completed work of creation and deliverance through rest. Sabbath is identified as part of how the "remnant" live, in accordance with Revelation 12:17, a test of loyalty in the last days to God/God's law and Christ, the Creator who rested on the Sabbath (Genesis 2:2 /John 1:1-3). Sabbath is a time to "delight" in God. And it's a means to practically and actively proclaim and participate in the fulfillment of the three angel's messages of Revelation 14, particularly to worship the Creator (verse 7).

Sociologically and politically, Adventist Sabbatarianism has served several purposes, as well, including as a vehicle for Christian education and witness activities and an impetus for the creation of institutions built and maintained to accommodate the Friday to Saturday sunset-to-

theology, seeing within the change that Sabbath itself was infused with resurrected life, something that contributes to the defeat of death itself. Tonstad and Dhoukan would argue otherwise, and for a later Sabbath to Sunday transition date. The best evidence in my view is that as early as the 2nd century observance was shifting to Sunday in some geographical areas as some Christians felt the need for clearer points of differentiation from Judaism, as Christianity emerged as a distinct faith, enduring Jewish persecution, and Roman conflation of Christians as rebel Jews leading to Roman persecution.

sunset schedule (i.e. Adventist Education and Conference “Religious Liberty” departments). It has heightened separatist and sectarian tendencies through difference. Emphasis on “Sabbath-keeping” has historically involved a total withdrawal from economic activities, shopping, and consumerism on Sabbath. It has also yielded a genre of literature around resistance in the face of pressures to work or participate in military or secular activities where either profound suffering/abuse has resulted (a form of martyrdom) or providential protections came as miraculous signifiers of God’s reward for faithfulness.

Over the past several decades, the framing of Sabbath has shifted somewhat to also include recovery of being, personal perspective; to re-engage with familial and social relationships; to engage ministries of mercy, healing, and even social justice; to recreate; and more.⁴⁰⁸ For decades, books by Jewish authors on Sabbath have been tended to, with significant attention to Abraham Heschel’s classic work. More recently, a variety of Adventist, mainline and evangelical books exploring Sabbath as a personal form of spiritual discipline, a time to embrace quiet, enter rest, unplug from our electronic lives, and celebrate through disciplines of feasting have been at the fore. Other popular books have looked at the communal aspects of Sabbath, emphasizing the way it defines and sustains community (sociologically speaking) and how it develops group affinity and unity, blesses families, and allows for increased efficiencies.

Even with all this, the emphasis in Adventist Sabbatarianism has never been explicitly *ecological*. Environmental benefits connected to Sabbath-keeping have been a virtual footnote, if mentioned at all in Adventist books and journals. This is not to say that there are not ecological effects related to Adventist Sabbath-keeping, as religious scholar Laura M. Hartman points out.

⁴⁰⁸ For a more comprehensive and contemporary look at Adventist Sabbatarianism, Mary-ellen Colón, PhD, offers a summary of her dissertation’s findings on the subject. Mary-ellen M. Colón, “Guiding Principles for Sabbath Observance,” *Elder’s Digest* (April/June 2009), 12-14.

Hartman defines Sabbath” broadly as “a weekly time of spiritual observance and altered habits, primarily characterized by rest and prayer or worship.”⁴⁰⁹ While she does not share an Adventist concern for the day of observance, nor does she agree that early Christians kept Sabbath, that is not her primary point, as she and I agree the Sabbath is grounded in creation and liberation.⁴¹⁰

Beyond creation and liberation, Hartman joins key scholars in naming Sabbath as an environmental practice. “Sabbath-keeping ... can be an environmental practice insofar as it encourages a God-centered perspective that values non-human nature and promotes behaviors that use comparatively fewer natural resources. Observing Sabbath, then, is a spiritual and an environmental practice.”⁴¹¹ Citing the works of Abraham Heschel, Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Dies Domini*, and Norman Wirzba, (whom she associates with the “Sabbath Economics Collaborative”), Hartman identifies the following specific elements that make Sabbath “an environmental practice: First, an altered, theocentric perspective; second, a slower, simpler style of living; and third, and eschatological encounter.”⁴¹²

Unpacking these ideas yields perspectives helpful as ecotheological material, and just as importantly, pedagogical material. Hartman asserts that the “altered, theocentric perspective entails humility about human importance relative to the rest of creation and leads Sabbath-keepers to re-orient their lives according to what they see as God’s priorities—which often includes attention to and care for the non-human natural world.”⁴¹³ Creation care follows God’s creative priorities, though Hartman is careful in the notes to make it clear a God fashioned after

⁴⁰⁹ Laura M. Hartman, “Christian Sabbath-Keeping as a Spiritual and Environmental Practice,” *Worldviews* 15 (2011): 47–64, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853511X553769>.

⁴¹⁰ Hartman, “Christian Sabbath-Keeping,” 49.

⁴¹¹ Hartman, “Christian Sabbath-Keeping,” 51.

⁴¹² Hartman, “Christian Sabbath-Keeping,” 54-55.

⁴¹³ Hartman, “Christian Sabbath-Keeping,” 55.

humans is not likely to be any more ecological. She sees biocentrism as more ecological than anthropocentrism,⁴¹⁴ a point which begins to attend to my question regarding Adventist concerns for a literal six-day creation and short geological timetable without concomitant interest in creation itself, or care for creation.

Hartman's "slower, simpler style of living" conceptually oscillates between spiritual and practical/environmental benefits obtained through Sabbath living. Sabbath entails rest, a theme worth exploring in terms of place and land. It means the surrender of time to economic reduction in consumption and production and the environmental degradation often caused by both.⁴¹⁵

Hartman directly mentions Adventist eating in the context of her notes on Sabbath and food, citing the economic and environmental benefits of Adventist dietary rules.⁴¹⁶ Vegetarianism, slow food, localism, and shared meals in community can be part of Sabbath practices.

Building on Dhoukan's work, Hartman astutely notes the eschatological functions of Sabbath. "Marking the end of the week, the Sabbath functions as an *eschaton*, thereby pointing to the cosmic eschaton, the end of time."⁴¹⁷ Her read of the eschatological importance of the Sabbath to Adventists is a "glimpse into eternity,"⁴¹⁸ pointing in the present toward the fulfillment of both creation restored and of God's purposes in creation.⁴¹⁹ Sabbath has an optimistic element of anticipation in the face of nihilistic apocalypticism.

⁴¹⁴ Hartman, "Christian Sabbath-Keeping," 55.

⁴¹⁵ Hartman, "Christian Sabbath-Keeping," 57.

⁴¹⁶ Hartman, "Christian Sabbath-Keeping," 57.

⁴¹⁷ Jacques R. Dhoukan, "Loving the Sabbath as a Christian: A Seventh-Day Adventist Perspective," in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara C. Eskanazi, Daniel J. Harrington, and William H. Shea (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 152, as cited by Laura M. Hartman, *The Christian Consumer: Living Faithfully in a Fragile World*, 1 edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 139.

⁴¹⁸ Hartman, "Christian Sabbath-Keeping," 60.

⁴¹⁹ Hartman, "Christian Sabbath-Keeping," 60.

These three understandings make for a pedagogy of observance.⁴²⁰ In the face of resistance, Hartman sees the Sabbath as a conceptual, practical, and pedagogical tool in the “Christian environmentalist’s toolbox.”⁴²¹ At the very least, it is a day of doing no harm. At its best, Sabbath is a grounded spiritual and environmental practice that touches upon our creaturely orientation, humility, trust, dependence, care, celebration, health, food, and rest for all and everything that offers pedagogical tools for making us better inhabitants.

I find it of interest that Hartman connects food and faith in a way I had not. A “Sabbath lifestyle means temperance and simplicity in the consumption of food.”⁴²² My own theology and practices have generally moved toward Sabbath as a day to eat special foods, an idea she also references,⁴²³ connecting it to slow and local food movements, a connection ripe with pedagogical possibility. She observes simplicity and surrender in Sabbath practices, as well as transformation of lifestyle choices.

Hartman also connects food and spirituality in the Eucharistic feast, the Communion Table, as Ayres and Wirzba do. She rightly observes that participation in the Eucharistic feast is an eschatological act (1 Corinthians 11:26), a remembrance placed before the Christian to continue doing until Christ returns. There is no doubt the ritual is embedded with ecological meanings.

Well-known physician, author, lecturer, and founder of the “Blessed Earth” organization, Matthew Sleeth writes on similar themes and ideas around Sabbath and ecology. His “24/6” video, book, and curriculum guide offer all these ideas, and more, infused with an ethos that

⁴²⁰ Hartman, “Christian Sabbath-Keeping,” 61.

⁴²¹ Hartman, “Christian Sabbath-Keeping,” 62.

⁴²² Hartman, *The Christian Consumer*, 143.

⁴²³ Hartman, *The Christian Consumer*, 145.

resonates with Adventists, whom he mentions. While he is not concerned with which day the Sabbath is, he is persuasive in his appeals that it is worth keeping. For Sleeth, the ecological is woven through a seamless mix of theological insight and practical application, named in faith and framed in the context of American life. Sleeth sees creation as an *ex nihilo* event, as do most Adventists. His theological creativity and helpful observations emerge as he recognizes that Sabbath is an *ex nihilo* conclusion to the created order. Nothing follows in the wake of something.⁴²⁴ In a similar vein, he notes the way Sabbath functions as a fulcrum within the Ten Commandments, neither all about God or about humans, but bridging the two in the meeting of Creator and creature.⁴²⁵

What makes Sleeth ecological in his thinking and writing comes down to his profound understanding of the human body and psyche, in particular, the ways we benefit from rest. Sabbath rest has no downside. It is an antidote to several key illusions: 1) that success depends on constant striving,⁴²⁶ 2) that God can be known apart from rest, which shows us *who* God is⁴²⁷ in creation and redemption, 3) that we can recover healing, economic justice, and equal treatment of animals, aliens, and all classes of people without mandated rest,⁴²⁸ and that we can find meaning to our labors the other six days of the week without a day to rest and reflect.⁴²⁹

Essentially, integrated wholeness, connectedness, and groundedness is an ecological state. Sabbath rest offers time to heal from physical, “spiritual and emotional injuries;”⁴³⁰ to

⁴²⁴ Matthew Sleeth, *24/6: A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 2012), 23.

⁴²⁵ Sleeth, *24/6*, 36.

⁴²⁶ Sleeth, *24/6*, xiv.

⁴²⁷ Sleeth, *24/6*, 33.

⁴²⁸ Sleeth, *24/6*, 49-58.

⁴²⁹ Sleeth, *24/6*, 69.

⁴³⁰ Sleeth, *24/6*, 76.

recover from the hard work of the week;”⁴³¹ and to slow ourselves. Sleeth grounds his Sabbath-keeping in the story of Adam, taken from Earth, and the ways in which our biomes are reflective of the larger terrestrial biomes in which we function.⁴³² Here, we find the value of Sabbath as fixing place, which as discussed by Ayres and Orr has pedagogical value. Even the Israelites, wandering the wilderness didn’t move around on Sabbath. It was a fixing of place.

Sabbath practices mean resting in what God will do. Not only was place fixed, but manna was given in double amounts to be collected Friday and saved for Sabbath. No manna fell on Sabbath. Manna that fell Sunday through Thursday rotted if more than the one-day allotment was collected. Food becomes a matter of dependency, faith, place, and the recognition that the one who creates also supplies. The idea that we will have what we *need* is emphasized, building in a check on acquisition, holding, storing, and hoarding. Here, the economic implications of manna as provided sustenance start to sink in. Consumerist culture with its frenetic addiction to more and the work that consumes us to get there does not add to our lives qualitatively or quantitatively; instead, it drives us to destroy that which sustains our very existence.

Food features prominently in Sleeth’s discussion of slowing time. Unhealthy, “fast living that includes fast food and fast eating may ultimately be slowing us down” in unwanted ways.⁴³³ Time taken to cook and eat nourishes beyond caloric values.⁴³⁴ While Sleeth is neither theological nor directly drawing a line to ecology, for him eating has ramifications for faith and food is a huge ecological issue. The slowing of eating has ramifications for factory farming,

⁴³¹ Sleeth, 24/6, 77.

⁴³² Sleeth, 24/6, 105.

⁴³³ Sleeth, 24/6, 78.

⁴³⁴ Sleeth, 24/6, 78.

factory processing, health and welfare, pollution caused in transporting and distributing foods, plastic consumption and waste generation, and health.

Even with all this, it is worth reiterating the doctrinal and evangelistic emphasis in Adventist Sabbatarianism has never been *ecological*. Environmental benefits connected to Sabbath-keeping have been a virtual footnote, if mentioned at all in Adventist books and journals. Perhaps this is a needed shift?

In his introduction to *The Green Bible*, Sleeth outlines some lessons for today, taken from the story of the Good Samaritan. Here, he names the essence of the aim of this project, which is to find ways to overcome the barriers brought by Fundamentalist religions infused with nationalism and bonded to neoliberal capitalism. He notes that as we approach environmental problems today, we must recognize that for this “to have any lasting effect, our hearts must be moved by compassion.”⁴³⁵ Indeed.

Additionally, Sleeth notes that seeking solutions to environmental problems may be personally “inconvenient,” risky, and invite derision.⁴³⁶ Solutions will be “expensive” and may involve “our own resources.” In the end, the solution is about love of neighbor, just like the story of the Samaritan. “Everyone is our neighbor, including people across the globe and future generations.”⁴³⁷ Certainly nature is lying dying, bleeding out on the road as we pass.

Philosopher, theologian, and ecologist Norman Wirzba offers wonderful guidance toward an ecological rendering of Sabbath, noting “Sabbath is a teaching that has the potential to redirect and transform all our existence, bringing it into more faithful alignment with God’s life-

⁴³⁵ Matthew Sleeth, “Introduction: The Power of a Green God,” in *The Green Bible* (NRSV) (San Francisco: Harper One, 2008), 1–24.

⁴³⁶ Sleeth, “Power of a Green God,” 1–24.

⁴³⁷ Sleeth, “Power of a Green God,” 1–24.

building and life-strengthening ways.”⁴³⁸ Here, the notion of transformation and “alignment” is congruent with the underlying need raised by the plethora of information about our environmental crisis, the educational, theological, and scientific work that has been done around our crisis, and the ways in which knowledge itself has not, it seems, impacted humanity’s calamitous course. Alignment speaks to the phrase “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10 KJV) that Jesus used when teaching his disciples to pray.

Wirzba notes that “alignment with God’s life-building and life-strengthening ways” is too often assumed. Given that America has a “*religiously informed culture*,” Wirzba asks if we possible overestimate our piety?⁴³⁹ Do acts in the world follow praises offered in the sanctuary? Is God’s goodness seen in the way in which we interact with the created world? Does our worship of the Creator reflect a valuation of creation?

Sabbath has always been a special object of study for Adventists, who have seen the day as a foretaste of heaven, something to celebrate now and to anticipate in the fulfillment of time. Practically speaking, though, standards for Sabbath-keeping have often superseded understandings of Sabbath theology and practice as spiritually formative. Wirzba notes, “The real issue is whether we can learn to see, and then to welcome, the divine presence wherever we are... Sabbath practice, on this view, is a sort of training ground for the life of eternity, a preparation for the full reception and welcome of the presence of God.”⁴⁴⁰

This eternity comes through salvation which is framed in the language of the world to come. Salvation is temporally understood as absolution in the here and now, a personal event facilitated by incarnation and sacrifice, with ultimate salvation and escape vis-à-vis heaven—

⁴³⁸ Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, 20.

⁴³⁹ Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, 22.

⁴⁴⁰ Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, 24.

God's gracious out for our personal and collective problems. This view is inadequate, unsatisfying, and incomplete.

As the biblical witness makes clear, our practical living amongst *all* the members of creation is a deeply religious matter. This point needs stressing, especially in an age of individualism, because we are tempted to think that religious faith is ultimately and primarily about the believer's personal relationship to God and then secondly how we as humans treat and relate to each other. Faith is thus reduced to a spiritual affair that does not have a lot to do with bodies. The danger of disembodied or gnostic faith, besides denying the incarnation of God in the flesh, is that it becomes nearly inevitable that we will devalue and forget the many other bodies of creation too.⁴⁴¹

I agree with Wirzba. "We must broaden the scope of Christ's redemptive work beyond personal postmortem salvation to include the restoration of creation as a whole."⁴⁴² After all, what are we without environment anyway? The placing of humans in the garden suggests a connection between who we are; indeed, there's no life apart from it. Banishment meant and means death.

This soteriological grounding might give us space to think more broadly and urgently about God's salvific intent for all creation. Howard A. Snyder and Joel Scandrett do significant work from an evangelical frame around this theme. As one would imagine, the centrality of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, He who reigns in heaven and on earth, is the key to understanding the human vocation and call to be incarnational in enacting the healing presence of Christ on earth. It is a vocational call to embody salvation as something transformational in the here and now, materially. Their work seeks to move beyond the God-human reconciliation to include the reconciliation of all creation. Here are their words:

The church is in mission because God is in mission. God loved the world so much that he sent his only son to give us eternal life through faith in him. Therefore the church is to love the world and bring the good news to people everywhere. Biblically speaking, this good news is the healing of creation. Faithful mission therefore encompasses not only

⁴⁴¹ Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, 144, 145.

⁴⁴² Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, 44.

personal evangelism, compassion, and social justice; it includes proclaiming and living out God's intent for all creation. The ecology of salvation matches the ecology of sin.⁴⁴³

And so it must. The "cure" for the sin problem is not adequately addressed by the saving of repentant humans, and certainly not "believing" humans. The cure is adequate when it addresses the whole of creation and, as Snyder and Scandrett note in an earlier chapter, deals with the "groaning" of creation.

Wirzba offers this related insight: "A significant source of our error about creation, and thus also about God, is we fail to see the whole world as God's creation."⁴⁴⁴ We tend to call creation "nature," but that is not a biblical word, nor is it theologically helpful. The symmetry here is an aesthetic/logical confirmation. Creation belongs to the Creator. The Earth is our home, not our possession. Our sacred text tells us all of nature was affected in "the divorce," as Snyder and Scandrett name it, "between heaven and earth."⁴⁴⁵

Curricular and Pedagogical Resources

Key thinkers, through the books and articles engaged so far, have assisted in theological and theoretical production of a dialogical understanding of some means of framing and conceiving of a curricular resource that avoids the pitfalls and barriers in contemporary Adventism. I am particularly here referencing Adventisms most influenced by White Evangelical Fundamentalism and the barriers to ecological concern presented by the same. We turn now to practical thinkers who've devoted energies to curricular resources yielding practical ideas that may bypass the barriers identified.

⁴⁴³ Howard A. Snyder and Joel Scandrett, *Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Theology of Sin and Grace* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 96.

⁴⁴⁴ Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, 143.

⁴⁴⁵ Snyder and Scandrett, *Salvation Means Creation Healed*, 3.

Diverse curricular approaches necessitate careful choices in attempting to answer the question of how to help people understand food and ecology, the dire nature of Earth's environmental trajectory, and the necessity of caring for our planet. Christian curricula often overlay what should be a sacramental obligation to care for creation with theological, liturgical, socio-communal tools available in most communities of faith. Secular curricula generally offer values-based processes and ideas, often targeted to a particular segment of the population, such as K-12 school children or urban youth. As with my chosen dialogue partners, the curricular resources discussed in this brief section represent influences, pedagogies, adaptations, barriers, and more that I have used to develop major aspects of the TSGPP, as well as the pre/post-surveys conducted as part of the process.

In 2007, John Weaver and Margot R. Hodson essentially wrote what amounts to a small book in response to a joint 2006 conference of the European Christian Environment Network and the International Baptist Seminary (IBTS) in Prague exploring creation care. The goal of the conference was to find ways to “build a concern for the environment into every aspect of the life of Christian communities.”⁴⁴⁶ At the time, the IBTS sought to become an “eco-seminary,”⁴⁴⁷ an admirable objective for which areas of inquiry included doctrine, biblical evidences, ethics, mission, and worship.⁴⁴⁸ While not as specific as some of the work I have cited, Weaver and Hodson also list reasons for Christian ecological indifference. First among these reasons is “the emphasis on personal salvation”, or the challenge of individualism. Second, “the failure to understand the nature and significance of the incarnation.” This second idea finds significance as

⁴⁴⁶ John Weaver and Margot R. Hodson, eds., *The Place of Environmental Theology: A Course Guide for Seminaries, Colleges and Universities* (Praha, Czech Republic: Whitley Trust, UK and the International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, 2007), 5.

⁴⁴⁷ Weaver and Hodson, *Environmental Theology*, 7.

⁴⁴⁸ Weaver and Hodson, *Environmental Theology*, 8.

enfleshment values the material and implies the mutual dependencies with environment. Third, this curriculum also notes the significance of the challenges of the “the Apocalyptic vision of the Church and a limited Eschatology.”⁴⁴⁹

Also present in their work, the ideas of “Metamorphosis -Transfiguration”⁴⁵⁰ tie into the question of what needs to happen and what I mean by “transformative” when naming the small group curriculum. Theory and practice, doctrine and ethics, education, and the implementation of all these areas through practical steps are key.⁴⁵¹ Both the individual and the larger society must be transfigured ecologically. We must become ecological beings. Weaver and Hodson offer descriptions of myriad organizations seeking to carry out this task and to offer hope. The theme of interconnectedness provided inspiration.

The most practical takeaway ties into place-based, experiential education with a site visit, in this case to a dump. The questions that arise looking at an object in the trash—questions of what? where? why? and by whom?—pointedly drive home the realization that everything we dispose of has a deleterious environmental effect. Every purchase ultimately disposed of adds to the mountains of garbage we produce, affecting all creation from the waters under the earth to the birds who pick at the garbage and beyond. Grocery stores as “site visits” likewise point to localism, seasonality, and the ways food touches all aspects of environmental health and sustainability.

⁴⁴⁹ Weaver and Hodson, *Environmental Theology*, 12, 13. Many of these have been named or dovetail with those listed already in chapter 3. Additionally, Weaver and Hodson include copious quantities of fact and information on environmental ruin, which I found overwhelming. Because of this, my thought is that less fact and environmental information might actually be more effective in production of the TSGPP curriculum.

⁴⁵⁰ Weaver and Hodson, *Environmental Theology*, 42.

⁴⁵¹ Weaver and Hodson, *Environmental Theology*, 43.

The section on “Worship” offers riches too. Outdoor worship services connect directly to nature and inform one of the questions on my survey.⁴⁵² Suggestions around creative worship and liturgy struck me as possible tools and were ultimately part of the design, building on both confession⁴⁵³ and mourning.

Finally, they connect mission inextricably to praxis. Worship, Eucharist, and a more robust ecclesiology yield ecological and theological potential in thought, belief, and practice. Environmental information, doctrine, and ethics taught through carefully constructed questions, experiences, and the spiritual resources of scripture and religious practice modeled ideals worthy of emulation.

The work also includes a wealth of information ecologically and theologically in practices, resources, suggestions for further reading, and the bibliography. I remain grateful for the enormous efforts represented in this resource from which I garnered several useful ideas. While my curriculum was not sited at a seminary or institute of higher learning, these are tools for working with the educated, such as the pastors who participated in the small group intervention in this dissertation.

Another curriculum, this one by *National Geographic*, proved instructive. Long known for integrity and the beautiful ways it has educated the world on a variety of topics (environment, nature, indigenous peoples, ecology, endangered habitats and species), in 2014 the magazine partnered with the Center for Ecoliteracy. Together they published a curriculum “[l]inking food,

⁴⁵² Weaver and Hodson, *Environmental Theology*, 70.

⁴⁵³ Weaver and Hodson, *Environmental Theology*, 71.

culture, health, and the environment in keeping with “Common Core State Standards.”⁴⁵⁴

Impeccably credentialed and unequivocally connected to education and pedagogy, its core curricular subjects and ideas are simply replicated for segmented age ranges, with age-appropriate pedagogical changes. Two things stand out in this curriculum: 1) its readiness for adaptation to a church-based curriculum for the whole family, and 2) many Americans would be comfortable with the information delivery systems targeted for high school-aged learners.

In addition, food is employed both as an overlay to the project and as a pedagogical tool for individual subjects. The latter provides opportunities to look at “Food” in terms of narratives, foodways (systems), culture and geography, science and nutrition, and more. Applicability may be more direct for an Adventist K-12 school, done over a more significant course of time than a small group intervention might have space and time for. Even so, this curriculum was influential in modeling how food could function in dual ways as hermeneutic and subject and be readily adapted to multiple levels of age, development, and education.

Next, the Urban Institute published a curriculum for teenagers in 2018 based on interest in the creation of food literacy. While this dissertation explores why ecological information has not been more transformational, dietary and health information often suffers similarly. Clearly, some factual information and fluency are required, and this curriculum is very practical that way. After all, the earlier in life this literacy and fluency are established, the better. Designed in a format that could work for a church small group meeting weekly over a quarter, this curriculum would work well for inner-city ministries and churches. It effectively names the problems,

⁴⁵⁴ Carolie Sly and Leslie Comnes, “Big Ideas: Linking Food, Culture, Health, and the Environment - A New Alignment with Academic Standards” (Center for Ecoliteracy in Partnership with National Geographic, 2014), 3. https://www.ecoliteracy.org/sites/default/files/uploads/shared_files/CEL_Big_Ideas_Alignment_K-12.pdf.

offering group processes, narratives, projects, and activities that reinforce the learning. These tools are useful, though far more plentiful and involved than time, duration, and locale might permit. The curriculum takes a hopeful tone, offering positive ways to work together to address core issues. Hope is important, and something I chose to build into my own curriculum.

More directly of use, the opening exercise places the focus on self in relationship to what is termed “space.”⁴⁵⁵ By “space,” they mean a safe context allowing room to reflect, learn, and grow.⁴⁵⁶ The situated self, able to respect others while embracing the ability and psychological freedom to fully participate, is also functionally free, more able to absorb information on individual terms. This idea of “space” was incorporated in the design of the TSGPP. Additional ideas like “no cell phones,” “encouraging those who speak often to step back and listen, and encourage those who do not speak often to step up and contribute”⁴⁵⁷ always make a group experience more focused and participatory. Covenanting with each other, with goals of mutual support and positive ways of dealing with disagreement,⁴⁵⁸ was something I also chose to incorporate. The importance of safety through creating “space” proved invaluable.

Section four dealt with food systems. The activity involved a handout that graphically and simply illustrated the food chain. The question, “What resources are needed at each section of the (food) chain?”⁴⁵⁹ guides one to the realization that everything is connected, implicated, complicit, and impactful when it comes to food. Shifting consumptive patterns can make a big

⁴⁵⁵ Michaela Lipman and Megan Thompson, “Teen Food Literacy Curriculum” (Urban Institute: Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center, April 2018), 3.

⁴⁵⁶ Lipman and Thompson, “Teen Food Literacy Curriculum,” 3.

⁴⁵⁷ Lipman and Thompson, “Teen Food Literacy Curriculum,” 9.

⁴⁵⁸ Lipman and Thompson, “Teen Food Literacy Curriculum,” 9.

⁴⁵⁹ Lipman and Thompson, “Teen Food Literacy Curriculum,” 29.

difference in land use, water and energy consumption, waste dumping, and more.⁴⁶⁰

Understanding supply and delivery systems offers insights into a host of related issues, including food deserts and slums and food justice. Chapter nine addressed connectivity and the relatedness of all things, and in doing so, named inequalities that contribute to food justice issues.

Connectivity evidenced through foodways is also a means to name and describe differences pointing to endemic societal biases, injustice, and poverty. These are of serious interest. Finally, what felt most applicable, though, was the shared food experience of potluck! Potluck is a feature of Adventist life and a great curricular tool I have used before. Unfortunately, with Covid-19, the small group project was unable to incorporate shared food practices, though this feature would be easy to add when safe to do so.

Next, *Eating Well: For Ourselves, For Our Neighbors, and For Our Planet*⁴⁶¹ is an interdenominational effort. Like the *Big Ideas* curriculum, this one is written to be adaptive, with multiple generations in mind, primary age to adult. The opening acknowledgment in the “Leader's Notes” is right on point:

“Food is a surprisingly complex issue. Where our food comes from, the ways in which it is grown and produced, the treatment of farm workers, our purchasing choices, the availability of food around the world, and the types and quantity of food we consume are all interrelated. At the very root of the issue is our intimate relationship with God's good creation and how we steward it.”⁴⁶²

The purpose statement was equally on point, naming “the interconnectivity between food and respecting creation, having enough, (and) loving neighbors...”⁴⁶³ The pedagogical strength is the

⁴⁶⁰ This would be the thread that fleshed out an idea given me by Samantha Wilson for a virtual ecological field trip around food and environmental destruction in November 2020.

⁴⁶¹ Leslie Forrest et al., “Eating Well: For Ourselves, For Our Neighbors, For Our Planet,” ed. Lauren Chesson (North Carolina Council of Churches, 2014).

⁴⁶² Forrest et al., “Eating Well,” 7.

⁴⁶³ Forrest et al., “Eating Well,” 7.

multiplicity of interrelated foci, communicated through a mix of media, and activity. First, this curriculum offers varied printed prayers that communicate values around food and faith, community and stewardship. These function as a *de facto* pedagogy, an outstanding idea. If every element of a curriculum is thought out in such a way that method becomes pedagogy and practice, there is little chance it will not be impactful.

The format is simple, practical, and clear: Prayer, share, scripture, focus, activity, application, and more prayer. While each of these varies in each session,⁴⁶⁴ the repetition only serves to intensify the connections. Topically, the best feature of this curriculum is its attention to those who grow and harvest our food found in Chapter/Week 4. This point of awareness and care was utilized in the pre/post-survey, informing the ethical concerns embedded in the TSGPP intervention.

Finally, the most compelling Christian small group curriculum I have located is *Every Creature Singing*, a Mennonite resource developed in 2013 and updated in 2017 that could be used “as-is” in any educated moderate to progressive Adventist group or congregation. It is incredibly comprehensive, detailed, and filled with resources that are absolutely spot-on, but not so many as to overwhelm. Best of all, it explicitly utilizes ecological hermeneutics developed by Habel, Rhoads, and Santmire.⁴⁶⁵ Scripture is studied in this curriculum with hermeneutical prompts. These focus the reader six ways: First, “noticing non-human elements” strikes at our anthropocentric tendencies. Second, the prompt “Where are we?” situates the reader in both

⁴⁶⁴ *Eating Well* is designed to go for eight weeks.

⁴⁶⁵ Norman C. Habel, David Rhoads, and H. Paul Santmire, *The Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary* (Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 2011) cited in Jennifer Haltemann Schrock, Luke Gascho, and Janie Beck Kreider, “Ecological Lens Questions,” in *Every Creature Singing* (Online: Mennonite Creation Care Network, 2017), 1-2, <https://mennocreationcare.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Eco-Lens-Handout-2.0.pdf>.

contemporary time and space and imaginatively in context, a movement toward the importance of *place*. Third, the idea of interconnectivity links humans “to lands and other living things” and offers non-human creation a “voice.” Fourth, “God's redemptive work” is pursued in how we view nature, particularly in sustenance. The fifth focus seeks how we might “connect with Christ,” both in recognizing Who created and Who redeems and restores. Sixth and finally, the question of justice, both human and ecological, is connected to “damage to the Earth” and caring for “the most vulnerable people.”⁴⁶⁶ These also correlate to Habel's hermeneutical principles from which Tonstad wrote his commentary on Romans, *Paul Among the Ecologists*, referenced in the literature review.

The authors also draw on powerful spiritual practices proven formative throughout the history of Christianity. Many of these have been adapted to specifically include an ecological or nature focus. These are excellent and double as reflections and activities and form the core of the curriculum. These practices suggest a practical theological method that largely bypasses politics or numerous other barriers to ecological values, praxis, and an Adventist ecotheology.

As with *Eating Well*, prayer in Schrock's work serves both to cover one's scriptural investigations with an explicitly stated intention formed in prayer as an expression of desire and as a pedagogy for helping participants learn the powerful connections between heaven and earth, Creator and creation, Restorer, and all we might participate in restoring. Protecting what is pristine is far easier than restoring that which has been ruined. Prayer speaks to both sides.

Summary

The challenges and barriers that prevent Adventists from being more ecological are very similar to published Evangelical ideological, political, and theological forms of resistance. As

⁴⁶⁶ Schrock, Gascho, and Kreider, “Eco-Lens.”

Evangelical resistance to ecology has grown over the last fifteen or so years, this chapter featured select conversation partners outside of the Evangelical community, chosen because they offer a variety of tools that bypass these barriers and reach core human and religious concerns. If Tad DeLay is correct in his analysis that “desire” is at the core of the problem, then movement toward a practiced theology of ecology requires movements that bypass resistances by naming spaces, articulating hermeneutics, employing ritual, telling stories, engaging place, and practicing embodied and spiritual practices. Appealing to the sustenance every human life depends on, food, seeks to move us to equally deep or deeper “desires.”

This chapter has engaged with the works of Ayres, a practical theologian and religious educator focused on food. When looking at Sabbath as an ecological concept, Ayres presents highly relevant and practical viewpoints theologically, pedagogically, hermeneutically, situationally, and ecologically. Her work around foodways and the spirituality of the table and Table build on and dovetail beautifully with Wirzba’s theology of Eucharistic eating. Ayres attunes to the place and space that is required formatively in order for nature to serve as pedagogy and to move us toward appreciation of what wonders are as inhabitants.

Hartman assists us by explicitly naming Sabbath, with its accompanying withdrawal from consumptive practices, as ecological—touching on everything from land ethics to food and localism to Sabbath as *eschaton*. Sabbath serves as concept, practice, and pedagogy. Sleeth deepens our appreciation of what it means to rest on every level, as well as the profound personal, relational, and environmental benefits this rest brings. Wirzba offers more of a systematic approach to Sabbath, framing it as preparation for heaven as so many Adventists do. More importantly and finally, Sabbath is about alignment with God’s creative purposes. Sabbath stands as a teleology of the interrelatedness of all creation. Each of these concepts broadly

informs the construction of the TSGPP curriculum, and what does not find direct expression in the curriculum contributes to interpretation as it unfolds.

As we shift to examination of extant curricula, a number of helpful ideas, concepts, pedagogies, and group processes were revealed. Weaver and Hodson confirm there are barriers in religious communities to ecological living, and they name a few. They illustrate how too many embedded resources, bibliographic entries, etc. can be overwhelming, that less content may be more effective. Their pursuit of individual transformation toward the image of ecological beings was useful as were their ideas for practical, place-based, experiential pedagogies with key ideas like eco-field trips; outdoor worship services, and a more robust theology of ecclesiology and Eucharist.

Sly and Comnes do a lot with food as an overlay and pedagogical tool in *Big Ideas*. As food is ubiquitous, it allows ecology to be taught in different, age-appropriate, and completely relatable ways. It's that relatability I sought to emulate.

Lipman and Thompson's *Teen Food Literacy Curriculum* modeled outstanding ways to manage input and dissent and to create safety for exploration. The resources needed at each step of the food chain idea were very useful as I put together a virtual field trip. Connectivity modeled in potluck practices offered another clear connection to food as pedagogy.

Leslie Forrest et al., also modeled an adaptive, multigenerational model for church-based ecotheological reflection and praxis. Forrest names the complexities of food and our complicity in who we consume. This idea of "loving our neighbors" through care for farm workers made for a great bridge to ethics and praxis in my survey. Printed prayers with decidedly ecological and food-oriented themes inspired the idea to incorporate environmental prayer as pedagogy.

Finally, *Every Creature Singing* lent the idea of spiritual practices as a means toward ecological formation, which, I believe ought to be part of the definition of what it means to be spiritually formed as a Christian. Prayers here function as formation. In this curriculum perhaps more than any, readings textually situate the reader in the imperiled and wondrous world through an explicit hermeneutic that dovetails perfectly with the philosophical direction of this dissertation. Best of all, this hermeneutic or “lens” is not threatening. Rather the place-based pedagogy represented by it is consonant with dialogue partners covered earlier in this chapter.

Chapter 5 – Methods, Curriculum Design and Development

The growing ecological crisis and increased concerns about the future viability of the planet, along with all that is sustained on this once lush orb, has made ecology a multidisciplinary topic of great interest. The problem is particularly urgent for the generations that will experience few of the planet's natural treasures and pleasures while inheriting its desolation and ruin. How to help?

This curricular effort honors the work that has been done by Adventist scholars. It recognizes the turning of the church away from traditional stances of advocacy on pressing social and health issues, non-violence, and the love of nature as “God’s second book,” as the church has become more aligned with Evangelical Fundamentalism. It builds on resources outside the Adventist community that speak to the deeper questions that the political clime cannot adequately engage. Finally, through the crucible of intention, it lets time, relationship, and trust create space for movement towards God and God’s creation.

Methods

This is a mixed-method action research project. At the core of this discussion on “methods” are questions about the approach to research, ontologies and epistemologies underlying that approach, and/or the methods by which the approach is deemed valid. I describe the approach taken for this study and lay the philosophical foundations for a research ontology, defining what constitutes “knowledge” for the purposes of this study. Both mixed-method studies and action research are common to the social sciences, particularly education.

The arc of the dissertation suggests that two outcomes are anticipated. The first outcome is the collection and formation of theological ideas that suggest movements towards a constructive project in Adventist ecotheology. This outcome consolidates key ideas from the

literature review, ideas attributable to the small group, and my own constructive suggestions. Second, a second outcome anticipates that the TSGPP will be effective in moving group members toward personal transformation and ecotheological understandings transmittable in both personal and professional arenas of influence and action. These two qualitatively different outcomes nevertheless rely on experience, which constitutes a core epistemology in both action research and practical theology. The first “method” is the intervention itself, the TSGPP.

Mixed-Method Research

According to Creswell, a leading authority in mixed-method research, “a mixed-method study is one in which the researcher incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis in a single study. This type of study enables a ... researcher to understand complex phenomena qualitatively as well as to explain the phenomena through numbers, charts, and basic statistical analysis.”⁴⁶⁷ This is what the TSGPP is about. The overall intervention involves a Pre-TSGPP Survey that is to be filled out before the first session of the small group process and a Post-TSGPP Survey to be given afterward. These two surveys incorporate identical or correlated questions that yield “before and after” comparative data for quantitative analysis. The small group sessions and processes yield data that can be qualitatively analyzed, the process of which will be discussed shortly.

The efficacy of the mixed-method approach is well-described by Rossman and Wilson: “Mixing methods in evaluation research ... holds promise for strengthening our understanding of complex social phenomena and hence, the possibilities for improving social conditions of

⁴⁶⁷ John W. Creswell, “Chapter 18 - Mixed-Method Research: Introduction and Application,” in *Handbook of Educational Policy*, ed. Gregory J. Cizek (San Diego: Academic Press, 1999), 455.

nagging intractability. When we illuminate that complexity through multiple lenses, we see more facets than we only use one.”⁴⁶⁸ This capacity has the potential to do greater justice to the complexities intrinsic when working with multiple participants, knowledges, understandings, theologies, and subjects in the context of Adventisms, ecotheologies, and situated local knowledges of ecological realities. My approach is a systematic evaluation of lives and beliefs through the development and implementation of a curriculum (therefore incorporating information, activity, reflection).

This dissertation is laid out very similarly to the outline proposed by Russek and Weinberg⁴⁶⁹ and as assembled by Creswell.⁴⁷⁰ The introduction to the dissertation states the problem being studied, cites past research, identifies how gaps and named barriers will be met with the research conducted, and suggest the primary audience for the work. This current chapter identifies the rationale for methodology and references Appendix B – Pre/Post-TSGPP survey questions.

As has been seen, this dissertation draws on key thinkers and extant curricula for pedagogical, hermeneutical, and theoretical tools for constructing the intervention. Procedures implicate the researcher as co-creator and co-participant while also drawing on the researcher’s resources, knowledge, and skills. Data is defined by the responses to surveys; submitted artifacts; and transcripts. Analysis, both qualitative (in vivo coding and explanatory schema) and

⁴⁶⁸ Gretchen B. Rossman and Bruce L. Wilson, “Numbers and Words Revisited: Being ‘Shamelessly Eclectic’” (Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1991), 16, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED377235.pdf>.

⁴⁶⁹ Bernadette E. Russek and Sharon L. Weinberg, “Mixed Methods in a Study of Implementation of Technology-Based Materials in the Elementary Classroom.,” *Evaluation and Program Planning* 16 (1993): 131–42, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0149-7189\(93\)90024-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0149-7189(93)90024-3).

⁴⁷⁰ Creswell, “Mixed Method Research,” 466.

quantitative (comparative), yields results. In short, this dissertation fits a model of converging data in a mixed-method, small-group study.

Action Research

Elaine Graham defines action research as “a form of engaged, participatory problem-solving research which seeks practical, often explicitly emancipatory outcomes as its main objective. Its purposes ‘transcend mere knowledge generation to include personal and professional growth and organizational and community empowerment.’”⁴⁷¹ Underlying this is an inductive approach to knowledge that is committed to “human flourishing and liberation” and decidedly “multi-disciplinary, eclectic and unsystematic.”⁴⁷² Here, “the purpose of research is ... transformed understandings and values which inform a new kind of practical wisdom.”⁴⁷³

The TSGPP offers exactly this. Through a participatory, facilitated small group, the core research questions present as “problems” to be solved. The “practical” is manifest in eco-praxis and the ability to reproduce aspects of the curriculum in pastoral life. The “emancipatory” factor is interpersonally mediated, built on negotiated covenants meant to assure freedom to think and speak without fear of reprisal.

Ernest T. Stringer notes that “[a]ction research starts ... with a problem to be solved.”⁴⁷⁴ While the research question posed in this dissertation comes from a doctrinal statement formed of deductive systematic methods and epistemologies of authority, and the problems posed by the ecological crisis are often formulated in terms of scientific methods with empirical-rational

⁴⁷¹ Kathryn Herr and Gary L. Anderson, *The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide For Students And Faculty* (London: Sage Publications, Inc, 2005), 1, quoted in Elaine Graham, “Is Practical Theology a Form of ‘Action Research’?,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 17, no. 1 (2013): 149, <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2013.0010>

⁴⁷² Graham, “Is Practical Theology a Form of ‘Action Research’?,” 149.

⁴⁷³ Graham, “Is Practical Theology a Form of ‘Action Research’?,” 149-150.

⁴⁷⁴ Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 40.

epistemologies, the TSGPP accepts both of these discursively as “experience.” The pedagogical movements are towards “reflection,” and the transformative aspects suggest “action” through change of heart and mind as well as new objectives in ecological living and ecotheological teaching and praxis.

Further, Stringer states that the goal of such research “is not the production of an objective body of knowledge that can be generalized to large populations. Instead, its purpose is to build collaboratively constructed descriptions and interpretations of events that enable groups of people to formulate mutually acceptable solutions.”⁴⁷⁵ Indeed, the small group as a setting for intervention is only generically reproducible. Individual experience and knowledges are brought into dialogue fostered by curricular materials and pedagogical methods yielding conversations and encounters from which the equivalent of “solutions” are mediated. Clearly, the scope of the ecological transcends institutions and individuals, so “solutions” can only be individualized and localized—or theorized.

Graham notes that in a complex organization, “the best and most reliable data will come from the tacit knowledge of insiders, even though an outsider may help them to be more explicit and strategic about their tacit knowledge.”⁴⁷⁶ While this is important from the standpoint of “respect,” insiders “are important as an anticipation of a new social order.”⁴⁷⁷ Exactly right. This intervention is situated and contextualized by knowledges, both tacit knowledges and those knowledges made explicit; it is mediated by someone outside the corporate employing structure, and it anticipates transformation in a way that will have effects beyond the TSGPP, mediating new ways of thinking and being, particularly to church and church community relationships to

⁴⁷⁵ Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 40.

⁴⁷⁶ Graham, “Is Practical Theology a Form of ‘Action Research’?,” 152.

⁴⁷⁷ Graham, “Is Practical Theology a Form of ‘Action Research’?,” 152.

ecology. “Action research is ... strongly value-oriented, addressing issues to do with human flourishing, and well-being, be they personal, corporate or ecological.”⁴⁷⁸

In short, action research works methodologically because its goal is transformational as well as efficacious, “cultivating in its participants a greater aptitude for action *and* [sic] reflection.”⁴⁷⁹ Related to this, Graham takes note of Freirean pedagogy (much as Ayres did). The idea of “tacit” knowledge factors in Freire’s thought because these knowledges are “formulated outside the situation and then transplanted into the context in question.”⁴⁸⁰ In other words, they function as theory brought forward in critical dialogue, moving beyond literacy towards “facility for autonomous thought and action,”⁴⁸¹ beyond tacit knowledge. In this sense, it is not only transformational, but liberative.

Graham also identifies this type of research as “second person action research” noting that “the means and ends are indivisible.”⁴⁸² Here, there is a sense that the collaboration and relationships that facilitate it constitute a type of outcome, irrespective of change, or, in this context, of “transformation.” This is a unique and key component of this type of action research method.

Philosophically, action research and practical theology share common underlying ideals and epistemologies. Pragmatism is the philosophical school in which this type of contextual theology, as well as inductively perspectival and experiential epistemologies, find common ground. Epistemologically speaking, Graham notes that qualitative research “deals with ‘ideographic’ rather than ‘nonthetic’ knowledge: on interpreting situations that cannot be

⁴⁷⁸ Graham, “Is Practical Theology a Form of ‘Action Research’?,” 152.

⁴⁷⁹ Graham, “Is Practical Theology a Form of ‘Action Research’?,” 154.

⁴⁸⁰ Graham, “Is Practical Theology a Form of ‘Action Research’?,” 155.

⁴⁸¹ Graham, “Is Practical Theology a Form of ‘Action Research’?,” 155.

⁴⁸² Graham, “Is Practical Theology a Form of ‘Action Research’?,” 157.

replicated under scientific conditions, thereby producing conclusions that can be generalizable beyond their original context.”⁴⁸³ This offers hope beyond the immediacy of the TSGPP for others who would follow the outlined curricular small group process.

In the context of practical theology, there is an added dimension of self-reflexivity necessary to situational dynamics and pedagogical movements toward transformation. This self-reflection must be modeled by the facilitator first and foremost, and it performs dual functions of situating the facilitator within the group and bringing the group into the position of partnership in finding a solution. There is a mutual focus on the highlighted problems. Solutions or ideas come out of co-creative processes that take individual experience and frames of reference into full account.

Practical Theology

Moving to practical theology, Swinton and Mowat offer the following definition: “Practical Theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God’s redemptive practices in, to and for the world.”⁴⁸⁴ This definition allows for David Tracy’s “mutually critical correlation” whereby the act of doing theology changes the world in which that theology is done, and the theology is changed by the world in which the doing of theology was done.⁴⁸⁵ In other words, ecology plus theology yields understandings that both sacralize creation and lend an earthen grounding to theology.

⁴⁸³ Graham, “Is Practical Theology a Form of ‘Action Research’?,” 158.

⁴⁸⁴ Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 6.

⁴⁸⁵ Tracy’s “correlation” is also discussed herein on page 114.

Eric C. Carter presents the field of practical theology as a methodology, particularly in terms of the action-reflection modes of analysis derived from Schleiermacher.⁴⁸⁶ Essentially, this dialectic between subjective experience and theory becomes interpretive in the hermeneutic circle (Browning) and “consensus equilibrium model”⁴⁸⁷ (Osmer), qualifying as hermeneutic through the second theological task, which is interpretive, and taking advantage of multiple modes of social scientific and other analyses. This is important because methodologically, this research seeks to accomplish what Carter demonstrates practical theology can accomplish: to “undo the devastating separation between spirituality and theology, theory and practice.”⁴⁸⁸ The devastating separation between care for creation as doctrine and actual ecological praxis could be added here.

Clearly, God’s redemptive work is needed in the natural world. As Swinton and Moffat so eloquently observe, practical theology “can create the circumstances for transformative action that not only seeks after truth and knowledge, but also offers the possibility of radical transformation and challenging new modes of faithfulness.”⁴⁸⁹ The TSGPP lies squarely within this frame.

In Vivo Coding and Interpretive Schema

The nature of the TSGPP, with the qualitative data embedded in the “comments” sections of the surveys, the interviews, journals, hours of small group interaction, and a follow-up focus group, made in vivo coding an obvious choice, particularly as a form of grounded theoretical

⁴⁸⁶ Erik C. Carter, “The Hermeneutical Promise of Practical Theology,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 56, no. 2 (2018): 248.

⁴⁸⁷ Erik C. Carter, “The Hermeneutical Promise of Practical Theology,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 56, no. 2 (2018): 241.

⁴⁸⁸ Carter, “The Hermeneutical Promise,” 255.

⁴⁸⁹ Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, x.

research in which the subjects are acting in relationship to belief structures under interrogation in light of the current ecological crisis. Succinctly, “in vivo coding (a.k.a. verbatim coding) is a form of qualitative data analysis that places emphasis on the actual spoken words of participants.”⁴⁹⁰ It is often a first step toward axial coding, which “involves relating data together in order to reveal codes, categories and subcategories within ... one’s collected data.”⁴⁹¹

In coding entries, “the standard of reasonable inference”⁴⁹² was employed. This standard seeks to ensure that the researcher’s knowledge or interpretive frames are not projected onto a word, phrase, or longer quote, but rather that the coding reflects what may reasonably be inferred from what is actually said. Multiple codes may apply to one word, phrase, or longer quote,⁴⁹³ which was the case in this effort. The point is to allow the code, chosen in the above context, to provide the basics of a framework that will reveal more than the words themselves.

Codes become the means to organize quotes. Codes provide for categorization of data.⁴⁹⁴ Ultimately, codes provide the basis for an explanatory schema. There may be several schemas before the story behind the story emerges and provides unique and new insight.⁴⁹⁵ While obviously subjective, a valid schema incorporates all major data categories, “is marked by an

⁴⁹⁰ Jimmie Manning, “In Vivo Coding,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods* (New York, NY: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 1.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118901731.iecrm0270>.

⁴⁹¹ Mike Allen, “Axial Coding,” in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc, 2017),
<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411.n33>.

⁴⁹² Sonja K. Foss and William Waters, *Destination Dissertation: A Traveler’s Guide to a Done Dissertation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 246.

⁴⁹³ Foss and Waters, *Destination Dissertation*, 246.

⁴⁹⁴ Foss and Waters, *Destination Dissertation*, 249.

⁴⁹⁵ Foss and Waters, *Destination Dissertation*, 255.

organic and coherent relationship among your labels,”⁴⁹⁶ and builds on reasonable inference. Out of the schema emerge the story, the results.

Curricular Context: Adaptive Scholarship

Originally envisioned as an in-person seminar-style event in a small conference room sufficient to service up to twelve participants and equipped with a projector and screen, the *Transformative Small Group Pilot Project* (TSGPP) had to be adapted for online-only participation when meeting in-person became an unacceptable risk. The global pandemic affected everything from the permissions process⁴⁹⁷ and recruitment to the final online group session. Thankfully, practical theology as a discipline is rather responsive to the movements, concerns, and nuances of real lived experience. As I discovered, “adaptivity” can work methodologically as a guiding hermeneutic for change, particularly where the *telos* of the research is potentially impacted.

Site-Based vs. Online Meetings

There is a deliberateness about in-person small group or seminar-type gatherings, particularly in more formal settings outside a home. Even small seminar-style gatherings entail pre-planning in terms of budgeting, space planning and usage, signage, handouts, breaks and refreshments, meals if applicable, parking arrangements, et cetera. If the group is meeting in a church hall or corporate or hotel conference room, all of the attendant environmental cues that direct one to the purpose of gathering are physically present.

These intentional environmental cues are meant to lend focus and clarity to what one is going to do or be a part of. These visual, auditory, olfactory, and environmental stimuli signal the

⁴⁹⁶ Foss and Waters, *Destination Dissertation*, 262.

⁴⁹⁷ Permissions to involve pastors/employees in research were ultimately kindly granted by the Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

brain to anticipate, to engage. There is both novelty and familiarity simultaneously in that one church or hotel or convention center has more in common with other buildings or settings of its kind than not, and each is unique.

Being present to these public space environments is obviously deliberate. On the participant side, after discovery and interest, registration, and confirmation, there are the logistics of time and anticipated personal needs to consider. These are inherently more complex, factoring in transportation, distance, projected travel time, parking, and even security. On the day(s) of gathering, one must consider weather and wardrobe, items needed for comfort, and the tech necessary to manage work emails or navigate an emergent problem at home. A way of facilitating note-taking or recording (if permitted) might not be provided. In hotel spaces, staff can often park your car, give directions, or make a cappuccino, adding a dimension of autonomous pursuit to the experience. Dress tends to be more formal.

Online small group processes are more privately experienced, and functionally most often take place in home-based or office environments, although laptop computers, tablets, and phones are mobile and can function anywhere with a sufficient internet connection. The online gathering suggests a solitary virtual community experience in a controlled and chosen setting, completely different from what is described above.

In virtual meeting and learning, the field of visual interests is limited to what the camera captures in Zoom (or any alternative platform) for any given participant, or to what gets shared on screen. The most basic capture might even be a blank background or a preselected template or photo of some kind. Dress tends to be more casual. Private environments allow for less conspicuous or socially inappropriate consumption of food or drink. Multi-tasking on secondary

screens or picture-in-picture features is a real temptation, particularly if some aspect of the program or conversation does not appeal or hold attention.

In addition, there's an added and unique dimension to online group work. Unlike regular in-person conversation, one actually sees oneself through the camera as others do. This self-consciousness can be both distracting and focusing. In terms of audio, if recorded, what was said can be reviewed, often within the hour, which is definitely atypical in environments controlled by presenters, or where video or audio recording is prohibited.

Additionally, previously unknown factors like “Zoom fatigue”⁴⁹⁸ shaped our time commitments, as well as the frequency and sociability of breaks. The speed of communications was slower as participants went through the motions of “unmuting” and “muting” themselves again. Items that might normally be handled as handouts were presented via PowerPoint or offered as emailed documents, with the files later placed in a Google Drive. Even the ways we processed information and experience together, but separately, deviated from the in-person, seminar-style meeting norm.

The most significant adaptation was that pedagogy of shared place shifted to pedagogy of shared space and subject matter. Zoom offers a “speaker view,” but the semiotics of conference rooms are not fully translatable. As this was always meant to be a co-creative (if structured) process, this change proved to be advantageous, making it possible to experience the curriculum together interactively in the moment and opening the possibility of shared emergent ecotheologies.

⁴⁹⁸ Defined as “the term being used to describe the tiredness, anxiety, or worry resulting from overusing ... virtual platforms.” See Carolyn Reinach Wolf, “Virtual Platforms Are Helpful Tools but Can Add to Our Stress,” *Psychology Today* (blog) May 14, 2020, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-desk-the-mental-health-lawyer/202005/virtual-platforms-are-helpful-tools-can-add-our-stress>.

Why This Curriculum?

Culturally: American individualism, privatization of property, and sense of entitlements have elevated rights over responsibilities, leading over and over again to exploitation and the tragedy of the commons. Improving one's lot in life has become the end game. "Development" (often code for "exploitation") is the means. Economies must, it seems, forever grow. Adventist people are no more or less complicit here but are caught up in economics and politics.

Religiously: The conflation of nationalistic Americanism and Evangelical Christianity has influenced many Adventists, who no longer have the capacity to offer a critique of government abuses of power, land, or peoples. Religio-political ideology has supplanted moral imagination with a lust for comfort, entitlement, and power. Manifest destiny drives the narrative, rooted in God's choice of Abel over Cain, Seth over Ham, and Isaac over Ishmael... A chosen nation, a chosen people, a chosen remnant.

Philosophically: As is evidenced constantly in politics, we are living in a post-truth world in which one's reality is chosen for one. Even the harshest of contradictions, like our rapidly changing climate, do not always get interpreted outside one's personal, political, or "tribal" truth. An intervention is needed to drive us to examine our deepest values, our core loves, and our mutual dependence on one another and our planet and to help us move back toward "inhabitation." Given the profound structural, socio-political, and theological barriers to an Adventist embrace of ecological consciousness detailed in chapter 3, this work envisions an intervention with the potential to bypass or break down as many of these barriers as possible, as one possible way of moving toward ecological sensitivity, sensibility, and praxis.

Practically: The Adventist Learning Community describes itself as "a Seventh-day Adventist ministerial and educational platform designed to strengthen professionals through

continuing education courses, teaching courses, ministerial training, and dissemination of uniquely Adventist content for the church community and beyond.”⁴⁹⁹ There are courses and resources on just about everything *except* ecology and ecotheology. The absence of such courses suggests issues of focus, priority, or risk. There is simply nothing available specifically for Adventists. This dissertation suggests that there needs to be.

Curriculum as Intervention

I chose a covenantal group of limited size (initially 7-12). The eight-day design was for two days of consecutive meeting, with a mid-week check-in, followed by two days of consecutive meetings. A shortened and introductory opening session happened four days prior to the first session. Designed to be evaluative, the final session was also shortened to one hour and a half and took place eight days following the last regular session. The group gathered at mutually workable times chosen by the participants.

Seminary policy assures confidentiality. Priority is also given to participant safety. Even so, identifying participant comfort levels and entering covenants about confidentiality as well as about how we might address equity in sharing time and manage any emergent conflict served as a curricular feature, designed to facilitate conversation and given that conversation on controversial or politicized themes is unsafe.

The idea and goal of “transformative” spiritually renders the effort here. I have argued that information, *per se*, has not been transformative. So, what to focus on? Spiritual practices of prayer, guided intentions, meditation, scriptural readings, images, and narrative all function in two ways, transformationally and educationally. In other words, where facts are politically

⁴⁹⁹ North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, “About the Adventist Learning Community,” Adventist Learning Community, n.d., <https://www.adventistlearningcommunity.com/about>

disputed, where environmental knowledge and information have failed to motivate changes in behavior, formative practices entered into in the context of covenanted small group participation have a way of moving past the political noise, intellectual confusion, and argumentative objection. The experience of personal encounter through sacred text, reflection, and prayer can have profound personal, social, and political consequences. However, because this experience is between a person and the God of the text, the conversational Other, the experience stands apart from quotidian experiences in the day-to-day world.

The underlying efficacies are myriad, particularly the ways deep emotive truth impacts in ways that factual or intellectual truths do not. The world of politics is about cover. The world of the spiritual is all about revelation—even if it is ultimately personal. Inner openness allows for factual information to be received differently, adding to the movements, giving content to movement.

Few Adventists would deny the wisdom that we are dust, and unto dust we shall return. Whatever life eternal looks like, there is beauty in both life and the cycles that perpetuate it. In praying through what is biblically true, spiritually true, a different way of knowing emerges, a knowing that is not only connected to head, but also to heart, one that goes beyond individualism to connectivity.

This curriculum seeks to get to the core of desire, or at least to arouse it. If DeLay is right, that Evangelicals' desire is psychologically much darker and more dangerous than we might ever think, the only way to shift the Adventist Church toward an eco-consciousness is to shift desire. Who we are as creatures in relationship to creation predates tribalism, populism and the currents of contemporary political partisanship.

Curricular Elements

The curriculum truly begins with the small group process itself, which serves both as method and as container wherein the kind of safety that is required can be created and individuals could be free to share and co-create. This is crucial. Given the barriers listed previously, safety is a must if individuals are going to open up and share their insights, fears, and doubts. Participation requires a level of openness and receptivity that would be difficult outside this context.

To assist participants in connecting with scripture, Jo Ann Davidson's work was assigned because of her Adventist *bona fides*, and because she is able to somehow weave scripture through her work in beautiful, compelling, and credible ways. Scriptural grounding is key; all Adventisms have respect for scripture and take it seriously as a guide for life. Most Adventists, even pastors, have no idea just how many texts in the Bible speak to land or animal ethics, the beauty of nature, God's ownership of the earth and all that is in it, and God's regard for the life and environment created.

The primordial story of creation is in Genesis, and with it the Sabbath. Both are important for different (if related) reasons. Creation is at the one end of an arc in Adventist theology from protology to eschatology, Genesis to Revelation, Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil to Tree of Life. It is also where the idea translated as "dominion" is found. To understand creation not in terms of the fall but in terms of God's declarations of its goodness, to understand God's love of all creation, and to transition from Sabbath as a point of denominational differentiation to that which connects to redemption (soteriology) and eschatology (as an eschaton for creation itself) is to begin to grasp the movements here.

Underlying these moves are questions. What does God love? Do I love what God loves? What kinds of desires lie deep within, buried beneath the rush of life?

When it comes to eschatology, the question is localized and contextualized. Some part of the earth is always ending. So what about the present situation is different? How willing do we think a God who loves God's creation ought to be to hand us a new planet full of living things if we have not given a thought to loving and caring for our present home? How can we enter eschatological rest through Sabbath-keeping? And how is that an ecological practice?

Food is the finale. What does it look like to be reconciled to all creation at the Table? How can our eating enhance not only our own health and well-being, but also the health and well-being of others and the planet as a whole? How do our understandings of the Communion (Eucharist) feast invoke justice for all, including non-human creatures and plants?

Spiritual Practices

The inherent strength of adaptive curricula is that they can be altered. They can expand or contract to fit available dates or times. They can be modified to meet unique circumstances or to answer sensitivities within a particular small group or community. The inherent weakness of adaptive curricula is that modifications may inadvertently change the *telos* an exercise or even the *ethos* of the full curriculum.

A guided reflection, for example, may not be comfortable for some Adventist audiences. Yet spiritually formative practices have the best chance of bypassing contested or politicized

knowledges, particularly ecological knowledge.⁵⁰⁰ To substantively change or eliminate such elements would represent serious diminishment. The content, flow, and meter of prayers, meditations, practices, and processes is both practice and pedagogy.

The practices themselves involve slowing or ceasing; a sense of the aesthetic; retrieving our creatureliness; and finding our relatedness to all that is, our particularity, our sense of place. We are better able to see clearly what is, what is not, and all that is at peril. Spiritual connectedness moves in the direction of desire, helping us see what we really value in the deepest parts of our own psyches. There can be no valuation of Creator without a commensurate valuation of creation.

Part of the ecological challenge is the pace of what is happening globally. This is where Sabbath practices of slowing and ceasing are demonstrably ecologically sound. To slow oneself, whether in breathing, in being still, in shifting consciousness in positive ways, in finding empathy in the midst of the screaming call of life's constant demands, is part of the eco-logic, the transformation. Accessing and practicing love in different ways is an essential part of the curriculum.

⁵⁰⁰ Spiritually formative practices may themselves prove problematic, at least in some Adventist settings. "Directed" reflection/meditation suggests an individual is "opened" and "directed," influenced via another through imagines/imaging, words, or the presentation mood or tone. The labelling of a practice as "spiritual direction" may evoke fears of catholicization. In some Adventist/Evangelical circles, "meditation" in general is eschewed as an "Eastern" (meaning Zen, Prana, or Buddhist) practice, and therefore suspect, if explicitly not of God. Evangelical/Adventist condemnation of certain forms of spiritual discipline and practice, particularly when labeled as "New Age," interfere with the possibilities inherent in these practices. In this sense, such practices themselves are already contested and politicized.

The Arc of the Curriculum

Relatedness/Creation:

- Introduction to Ecotheology: What is ecotheology? Is our personal definition different from what we would guess the church's ecotheology might be? If so, how? Why should we care? What barriers do extant theologies pose to ecological living?

- Creation Care Grounded in Scripture: Shared experience around scripture is crucial. Scripture, after all, is a commonly valued authority, replete with references to the glories of the heavens; the bounty and beauty of the earth; the goodness of eating, sharing food, provision; and the mysteries of Earth's movements and ways. Animals are valued. Agriculture and husbandry are ways of life—and God's regard for creation is an eye-opener for many Adventists.

Eschatology:

- Where is the world ending around me? What do we see? Experience? Observe? This pedagogy is about *place*. The world may be ending differently elsewhere, but how is it ending in my yard, neighborhood, city, county, state, or area of the country? What non-native plants are cropping up? Do I hear or see the same birds anymore? Are there infestations of insects? Are severe weather patterns behaving destructively? Place-based education allows for notice, care, and concern. It is natural we value what is closest to us. Learning our local environments with love and appreciation is an important step towards a grounded ecology and faith.

- Personal narratives: Narrative pedagogies and visual media offer ways to share stories, perspectives, and beautifully render a subject in word or image. Creating PowerPoint presentations, sharing photos, listening, affirming, asking questions—these tools help us both name the reality and support one another as we do.

- Visual Field Trip: A variation and adaptation. This is a visual and virtual journey. For this group, the focus was places of ruin, decay, destruction. This was a chance to name where the world is ending around us.

Using food as pedagogy, a common soy veggie-food was analyzed in minute detail, from the way soy is engineered by firms like Monsanto to resist herbicides, to the petroleum-based Hexane solvent used to process the beans. Big Ag and monocropping emerge as sources of infestation and pesticides, excessive water use, and land depletion.

Mineral and coal mining provide ore for iron and coal to make coke, necessary for the superheated furnaces that turn iron into steel. Mining removes mountain tops, ruins landscapes, and strips topsoil and all that grows in them to get to coal beneath. Taconite rock is blasted to collect iron ore. Factories that turn steel into cans; spin soy into product, can and label, all these are named, implicated.

The virtual field trip offers a way to graphically tell multiple stories while opening eyes. This is an information-intensive pedagogy, but impactful too. Complexity and complicity are features of our food systems.

Sabbath as an Ecological Practice / Liturgies of Mourning and Repentance:

Scripture models such liturgies. Collective mourning recognizes what we have collectively lost, how we have collectively sinned, and how collectively we find ourselves now before God. It invites us to repent, to turn. This is a turn to the ecological, to what God loves.

- What/Whom Does God Love? What/Whom Does God Want to Save? John 3:16 says God loves the world. It does not say he loves only the humans in the world. What other texts go this same direction? Is it possible God loves all creation? Is it possible sentient non-human life matters to God? If we love our dogs and cats, how does God feel about them? Is it possible non-

sentient life matters to God? Or the inanimate mineral and other structures that support life?

What of these?

Food and Ecology / Restoration and Healing:

- Eucharistic Eating: How can our ideas of hospitality and food sharing translate? If it is Christ who was recognized in the breaking of the bread, how are we to be recognized? What role does justice play in the way our grains are grown and harvested? Do those who pick the grapes for our Communion juice have health insurance? Are those at our tables representative of the diversity around us?
- Narratives around Food and Consumption: Food, every aspect of food, gives shape to our lives. What stories do we tell about food and consumption? Consumerism? Patterns of waste and refuse? How can we connect consumptive and regenerative practices?
- Actions we can commit to: Recycling? Shorter showers? An electric car? Solar panels? Vegetarianism or veganism? Gardening in our back yards? Praying over a patch of earth we love, or that robins will return in the Spring? Can we cut back on the Amazon purchases? Where does the Sacrifice Christ made for the world rest with us in terms of the sacrifices we might make for creation, in honor of the Creator?

The curricular arc and embedded pedagogies, actions and commitments are realized through the four main three-hour sessions. The importance of the curricular architecture is the way it follows protology to eschatology, emphasizing the role of repentance and mourning along the way, moving to restoration and healing all in the context of food. While it might be meaningful for some facilitators to mark time for each function, I chose to let things organically flow, with options to briefly revisit a subject if need be the following session. This worked well.

Curriculum Daily Structure Outline

Sample Day/Session (3.0 hours)

Welcome: Each day all were greeted and had a moment to psychologically enter the virtual space. Banter allowed for easy entry should someone be a few minutes late.

Check-In: sometimes done before the worshipful moment, sometimes done after, the check-in is meant to promote safety and well-being within the group and to offer individuals an opportunity to share what they've been thinking about since the last session, or to ask questions that have come up in the meantime.

Worshipful Moment:

Prayer: Prayer functions as both the opening of the session spiritually and as a pedagogical tool, variously allowing reading, group participation, and always focusing on something in nature, always with an ecological overlay.

Prayer Pedagogy/Spiritual Exercise: Sometimes more meditative, sometimes about intention, sometimes a manner of praying, this segment of the curriculum invited participation in novel practices that the participant was likely not to have been involved in before. Sometimes challenging, they invite us to consider things in categories or in ways we had not before. Something we feel affection for in the natural world can be an inspiration for sustaining prayer, for example. Praying for understanding as we meditate on people with whom we disagree isn't easy. But these are the practices designed to help move us out of a personal stalemate with difficult subjects in a group setting.

Keystone Assignments: Keystone assignments function as homework, inviting participants to do something outside of the time we spend together. They reinforce the content of what is said in each session and provide participant-generated content for the sessions. The assignments varied, from reading assignments with follow-up discussions to creative exercises, visual media, and narrative pedagogy.⁵⁰¹

Curricular Subject: This area formed the bones of the curriculum and included theological subjects implicated as Adventist barriers to ecotheology and eco-praxis or offering new possibilities for the development of an Adventist ecotheology.

Reminders: The "reminders" category covers scheduling, survey response requests, journaling, and remembering to do the key assignments.

Prayer: Here the benediction is designed to anchor the session, and for this reason the same prayer is used repeatedly. The repetition reinforces the content and gives a sense of ritual, rhythm, and consistency to the overall implementation.

⁵⁰¹ See discussion of these tools on page 123.

Individual Day-by-Day Outlines

Day 1—Introductory Session (1.5 hours)

Welcome and Introductions - Getting Acquainted.

- Welcomes and introductions were informal. I offered a brief welcome and personal introduction. Each pastor-participant was given time to introduce themselves and to share their ministry contexts and what interested them in this project.

Worshipful Moment: Modeling an ecotheology – (15 minutes)

- e. e. cummings poem: “An Amazing Day”
- Prayer Pedagogy: Prayer for the Environmental Common Good, by Jane Deren
- Spiritual Exercise: Extending Jesus’ Redemptive Love
 - Select four images, each image reflecting an element in the curriculum.
 - Creation: The Beginning
 - Eschatology: The Destructive
 - Sabbath: The Pause
 - Restoration: The Healing Reconciliation

This exercise took about 15 minutes, working through prompts. For example: A photo of a fiddlehead fern beside Genesis 1:12: “Whatever mechanism works for you, visualization, something auditory, re-reading the text... Imagine God's love for this emergent life, and project your own love toward that image as you see it. What sort of beauty does it possess? Wherein do we experience awe or wonder? In what ways does this life sustain our own? Whom does the text say created emergent green life?”

Review of Participant Consent Forms: Risks Mitigations, and Remediations

Covenants and Rules of Confidentiality: This was also done through question prompts that addressed what was needed to participate in an honest way and to be open and vulnerable

- Confidentiality: Protecting the sanctity of our space
- Intellectual Property: Respecting the work of others
- Sharing talking time, resolving disagreements

Journaling: A way to be mindful and reflective, to name new awarenesses, to deal constructively with emotions, and to reinforce learning.

Outline of the Project & Schedule: Timing of sessions and main topic headlines

For Next Session:

- Finish the Survey Monkey survey
- Davidson article (choose one to read and reflect on)
- Buy a soy product and have it with you for the third session.

Closing Prayer Pedagogy: “Environmental Prayer” by Anonymous
Schedule Reminder & Sign Off

Day 2—Introduction to Ecotheology / Biblical Review on Creation (3 hours)

Welcome and Orientation to our Session

- e. e. cummings poem: “An Amazing Day”

Checking In: What has been on your mind/heart since we last talked? Does anything we discussed stand out? Do you have any lingering questions?

Group Covenants, Agreements, and Values for Confidentiality and Support: A Revisit

In this case, there had been some awkwardness and lack of clarity on these issues. Revisiting these allowed for more definitive statements of agreement and higher levels of safety.

Worshipful Moment:

- Prayer Pedagogy: Psalm 104, sectioned for each participant, read as a prayer.
- Spiritual Exercise: “Connections to Our Natural World” – I previewed a Key Assignment by taking three pictures that demonstrated my own connections and walking others through them. This connects individuals to their own experiences and values, facilitates connections, and opens discussion about interrelatedness.

Break and Journaling time (Babbling Brook on “Slow TV”)

Curricular Subject: Dialogue about Ecotheology: Ecotheology Defined

- Tell us about a time when you experienced an “ah-ha!” moment about the environment? Or when it became clear creation revealed Creator?
- What is *your* ecotheology?
 - What would you say is the ecotheology of your congregation?
 - What would you say is the ecotheology of mainstream Adventism?
 - What explains the difference between these three answers?

* The facilitator should be prepared to be vulnerable and model the depth of answer sought.

Text Activity: Jo Ann Davidson articles with handout of the scriptures used in one of them.

- Which scriptures have you preached? What were you trying to do?
- Which scriptures have transformed us? Which have not?

Focus on lived experiences and what brings me to the present moment. We know what’s been transforming for us—and we then know what might transform others. Encounter with environment as sacred is important. What does God love?

Check-Out Question: What was the most important thing said today?

Homework: Personal Histories: Narratives around nature, ecology, and environmentalism (*three images that tell the story of your relationship with the environment, place on PPT, bring to next session*). How is this related to your Adventism? What themes emerge?

Prayer Pedagogy: “Environmental Prayer” by Anonymous

Schedule Reminder & Sign Off

Day 3—Eschatology: Where Is the World Ending Around You? (3 hours)

Welcome and Orientation to our Session

Checking In: What has been on your mind/heart since we last talked? Does anything we discussed stand out? Do you have any lingering questions?

Group Covenants, Agreements, and Values for Confidentiality and Support: Final
Recited agreed-upon Covenants and confirmed everyone was comfortable.

Worshipful Moment:

- Prayer Pedagogy: Prayer and Mobilization to Action Changes Us
- Spiritual Exercise: “Praying with Intention”—Identify a specific place or places and a living thing (plant or animal) that you really care about. Pray daily with intention for that place or those places, the living thing and the entire ecosystem it depends on.
- Prayer by Michael Gormly

Exercise Based on Homework: 3 Photos, Participant Sharing Time

Break and Journaling: (Babbling Brook on “Slow TV”)

Virtual Field Trip: PowerPoint – “Where is the Earth Ending Around Me?”

This was an adaptive move. The intention was to visit a local site of environmental ruin, like the superfund site in Jurupa, the Stringfellow Acid Pits. I chose to do deep exploration of the way a soy product, FriChik, commonly known in Adventist circles participates in the destruction of the world, from soy production and processing to the steel used to can the product and the petroleum used each step of the way.

Homework: Liturgies of Mourning: Prepare something to share communally around any sadness, shame, depression, anger, fear, numbness, and indifference we might feel around environmental decay and degradation. Write a poem, song, eulogy, or liturgy. Modify a Psalm or a text of mourning. Create a visual media piece. It’s up to you! Your creativity. Your inspiration. It doesn’t have to be lengthy—only a true reflection of your feelings—what you want to say to God and share in worship with all of us.

Prayer Pedagogy: “Environmental Prayer” by Anonymous

Curricular Subject: Revisiting Ecotheology: Further discussion on the previous day’s prompts.

Journaling Reminder

Prayer Pedagogy: “Environmental Prayer” by Anonymous

Schedule Reminder & Sign Off

Mid-Process Individual Check-In—15 minutes to 45 minutes

(Scheduled by appointment using a Doodle Poll)

Safety Check-In: We've spent some time talking about how we'll honor one another in this process, particularly around confidentiality. Are there any concerns you have about your privacy or safety? Are you comfortable that we've done what needs to be done in making our commitments to one another?

Positional Check-In:

- Before this group, what has been your involvement with ecology or environmentalism?
- What has been your experience inside the church related to these themes?
- What is your present understanding about the environmental state of our planet?
- Has that shifted since we began our group conversation? If so, how?

Personal Check-in:

- Do you have anything you'd like to share with me one-on-one that seems significant to you?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Theological Question:

Read 2 Peter 3:10-13 / Revelation 21:1-5

Adventists preach, "Jesus is coming soon!" Adventist eschatology generally reads that at that time, God will destroy the Earth by fire (2 Peter 3:10-13) and will then make all things new at the end of the millennium (Revelation 21:5). We also preach that God is the Creator, the creation cycle is vitally important, humans are to steward the planet, and that Sabbath is a memorial of God's creative work—God's creation.

Question: How do you reconcile these seemingly disparate ideas?

Parting Questions: If appropriate, may I mention relevant or important *ideas* that have come up in this conversation to our group? Would you like me to do this anonymously, or are you comfortable being quoted within the group? (Pastors could choose whether they minded being referenced or preferred to not be quoted under any circumstances.)

Promised Transcript: Would you like a transcript of this conversation? (If yes, explain to the participant they are free to add any comments or clarifying statements to the transcript and return it to me.)

(The "Consent to Participate in Research Document" offered that where individuals were recorded, they could request a copy of the transcript and provide clarifying statements about anything.)

Day 4—Sabbath As an Ecological Practice (3 hours)

Welcome

Checking In: What has been on your mind/heart since we last talked? Does anything we discussed stand out? Do you have any lingering questions?

Worshipful Moment:

- **Prayer Pedagogy:** Prayer and Mobilization to Action Changes Us—Reminder of “Praying with Intention”
- **Spiritual Exercise:** Listening and Praying—For one week, suppose that hearing voices that you disagree with on environmental issues is your priority. How will you listen? What messages from this other world challenge you? Pray for someone on the other side of the issues.⁵⁰²

Prayer Pedagogy: Prayer

Virtual Field Trip: “Where is the Earth Ending Around You?” Revisit and Discussion.

Break and Journaling: (Babbling Brook on “Slow TV”)

Exercise based on Homework: Participant Sharing of Liturgical Creations

Here, the responses will vary. The point is to engage the group in collective recognition of the ways we are killing our planet and ourselves, and to mourn, confess, and repent.

Liturgy Modeled — “We Are Brought Low: Worship and Confession as First Steps to Human and Environmental Justice”

This was also an adaptive move. This could have been an antiphonal reading or a voice choir reading but ended up being all PowerPoint.

Curricular Subject: Eucharistic Eating: What is Eucharistic eating? How does this apply to church life? Shared meals? The table at home? How is Eucharistic eating environmental eating?

Homework: Bring photos of your soy product, and how you enjoyed that with your family! Eating should be joyful, even when we are complicit....

Prayer Pedagogy: “Environmental Prayer” by Anonymous

Journaling Reminder

Schedule Reminder & Sign Off

⁵⁰² Adapted from Schrock, Gascho, and Kreider, “Every Creature Singing,” 2-27.

Day 5—Soteriology (3 hours)

Welcome

Final Schedule Review

Worshipful Moment:

- Prayer Pedagogy: Lord, Grant us Wisdom to Care for the Earth⁵⁰³
- Spiritual Exercise Review and Reminder: Listening and Praying—For one week, suppose that hearing voices that you disagree with on environmental issues is your priority. How will you listen? What messages from this other world challenge you? Pray for someone on the other side of the issues.⁵⁰⁴

Checking In: What has been on your mind/heart since we last talked? Does anything we discussed stand out? Do you have any lingering questions?

Worshipful Moment:

- Prayer Pedagogy: Prayer and Mobilization to Action Changes Us—Reminder of “Praying with Intention”
- Spiritual Exercise: Listening and Praying—For one week, suppose that hearing voices that you disagree with on environmental issues is your priority. How will you listen? What messages from this other world challenge you? Pray for someone on the other side of the issues.⁵⁰⁵

Curricular Subject: Soteriology: What is it that God loves and wants to save? A re-examination of John 3:16.

Break and Journaling: (Babbling Brook on “Slow TV”)

Prayer Pedagogy: Prayer Pedagogy: “Eucharistic Prayer” (See Appendix C)

Curricular Subject: Eucharistic Eating: Narratives around food and consumption.

Prayer Pedagogy: “Environmental Prayer” by Anonymous

Journaling Reminder

Focus Group Schedule and Reminder, Gratitude, and Sign Off

⁵⁰³ Taken from “The Cry of the Earth,” http://www.praying-nature.com/site_pages.php?section=Eco-Prayers&category_ref=64

⁵⁰⁴ Adapted from Schrock, Gascho, and Kreider, “Every Creature Singing,” 2-27.

⁵⁰⁵ Adapted from Schrock, Gascho, and Kreider, “Every Creature Singing,” 2-27.

Day 6 – Final Day: Focus Group-Type Session: Follow-Up (1.5 hours)

Recruitment: What did you think of the initial recruitment flyer? What about it, if anything, made you want to participate? What gave you pause?

Communications: How have you felt about communications through the process? Was the Doodle Poll tool effective? Did you like the PowerPoint format as a guide to discussions?

Length of Sessions/Breaks: Zoom fatigue is a real thing. Were these sessions too long? Were there enough breaks? Do you feel the medium was effective for our group?

Survey: What did you think of the Initial SurveyMonkey Survey? Was it relevant to what we actually did? Did it stimulate any thoughts that weren't necessarily on your mind already?

Curriculum: Many of you have wondered about the curriculum. While I do hope to offer a printed version of the curriculum we followed, it was embedded in the activities and discussions:

- Prayer and meditations as transformative practice and pedagogy
- The concentrating power of a good quote or quiet moment
- Worship through art, poetry, reader's theatre, calls, liturgies of repentance
- Journaling
- Discussion in a safe environment
- Reading
- Reframing biblical text
- Reframing teachings, like Sabbath
- Seeking a deeper sense of what we really desire, for our planet, for generations to come
- Inspiration
- Love for creation, as well as the God of Creation
- Acknowledgment of the complexities and our complicities
- Naming some ecological practices, but more importantly, listening to what others find they can commit to doing

More Formal Elements:

- Ecotheology: A new way to think about theology and ecology in a Christian frame
- Eschatology: A barrier to ecological living, reframed in the present and in localized terms.
- Worship as a means of expression and entreaty re: the need for healing and restoration.
- Sabbath as an ecological practice that includes both worship and Eucharistic practices
- Eucharistic eating
- Recognizing the joys of less consumption, more sharing, greater simplicity, local gifts, those who grow, harvest, clean, sort, and prepare our foods.

Follow-up: Would any of you consider leading your own group around the themes discussed?

Curriculum Implementation

Why Pastors?

Pastors were chosen as co-creators, participants, and dialogue partners for a host of reasons. They are well-educated. They are wise. Pastors have tremendous capacities, theologically and biblically. The work with theology and biblical materials in practical ways. They know their people and know what triggers them. Parishioners largely respect pastors and seek their counsel and advice. Pastors know fatigue and yet still have their feet on the ground. They have developed credibility and social capital over time. Lastly but importantly, pastors work with families and children and sometimes influence their education, all at the stage of life at which ecological learning and love of nature need to take place—now more than ever before.

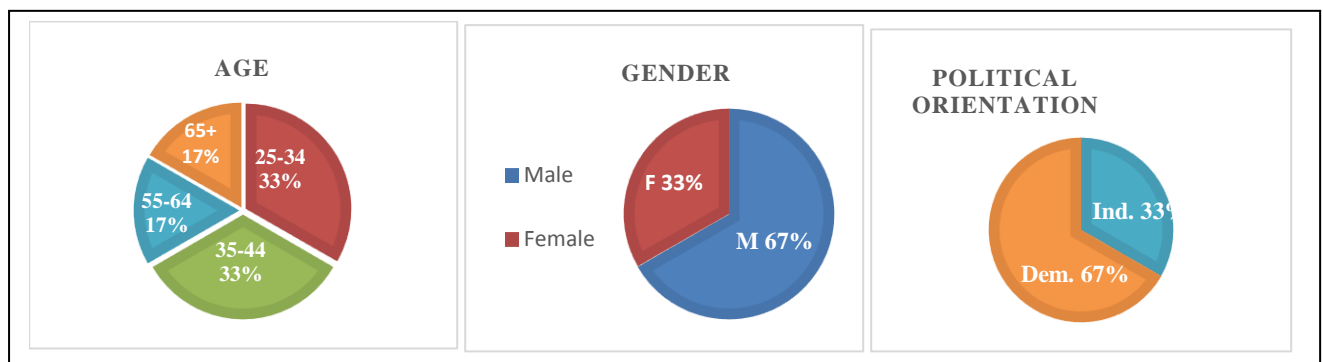
Demographics

As the graphs below make clear, the six pastors who volunteered for this study⁵⁰⁶ varied in age, gender, and political affiliation. Two respondents were in the age category of 25-34 years old, two respondents were in the age category of 35-44 years old, one participant was in the age category of 55-64 years old and one respondent was in the age category of 65+ years old. Interestingly, two-thirds were male, two-thirds politically Democratic, and two-thirds were under age 44. (Graph 1). Pastoral assignments (not graphically represented) varied from the sole pastor of a single congregation or district to specializations within congregations or a network of congregations.

⁵⁰⁶ Note: “TSGPP,” “Study,” “Project,” “Small Group,” “Investigation,” and “Intervention” should all be understood to be synonymous with “The Transformative Small Group Pilot Project.” Likewise, “co-creator,” “participant,” “member,” “respondent,” and “subject” (though I try to avoid this last term) all refer to those who took part in the TSGPP.

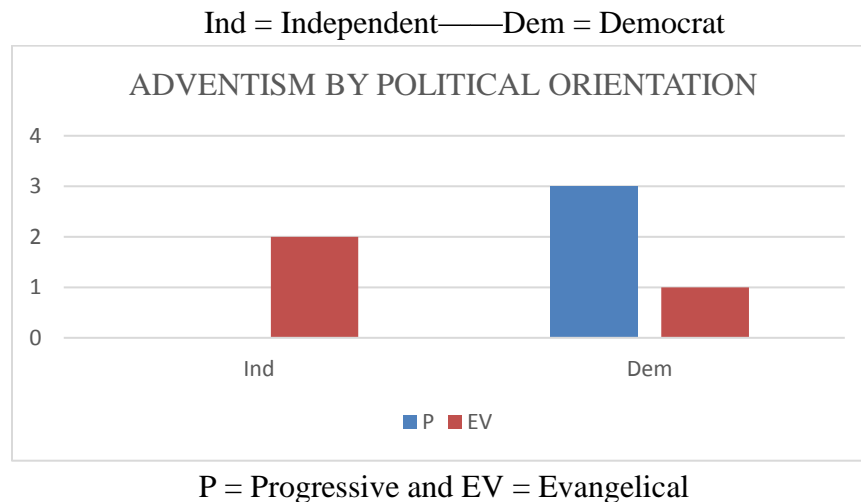
The range of ages within the pastor-participant group implies divergent social, ecclesiological, and ecological zeitgeists, worldviews, stages of maturation, and career horizons. At least four of the six participants either immigrated to this country or spent a year or more in foreign countries, having grown up in families engaged in foreign mission service. Five out of six participants were raised Adventist.

Graph 1: Demographics

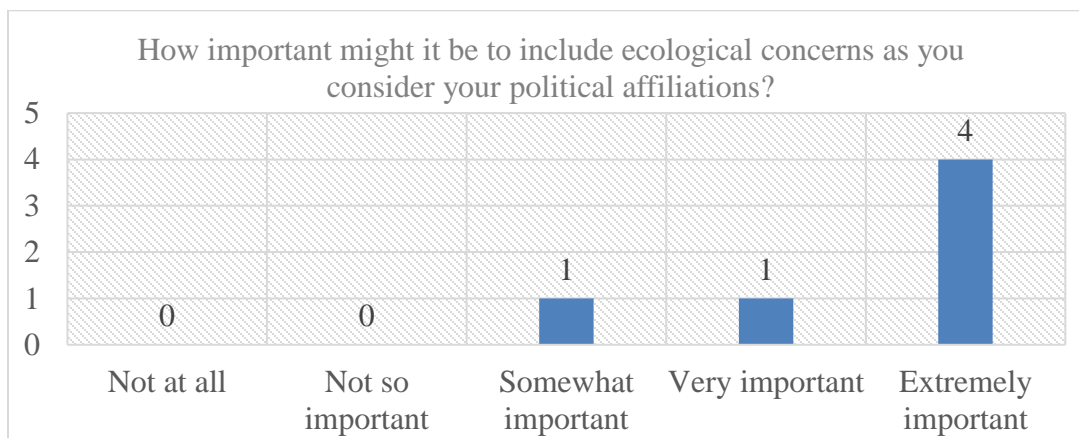


Additional demographic information was asked to understand where pastors fit in the spectrum of Adventisms. Half self-identified as “Evangelical Adventists” and half as “Progressive Adventists.” This was graphically compared with political affiliation. All “Progressive Adventists” were Democrats. Only one of three Evangelical Adventists voted Democrat. This one person felt ecological concerns were “Extremely Important” for inclusion and consideration in political affiliation.

Graph 2: Political Orientation by Type of Adventist

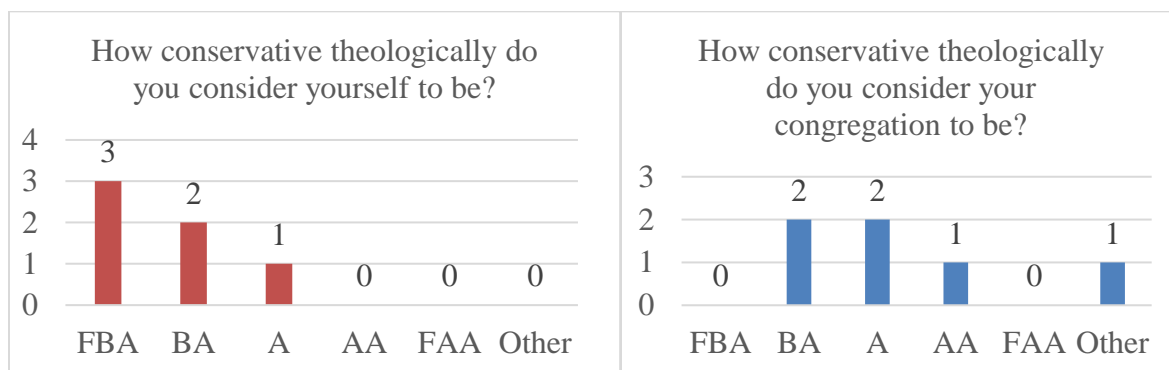


Graph 3: How important are ecological considerations in choosing political affiliations?



Respondents were also asked how conservative they estimated themselves to be, particularly in comparison to their congregations or assigned ministries. Four out of six respondents considered that their congregation's level of conservatism was Average ("A") or above average ("AA"). Two felt their congregations were less conservative, but not significantly. Interestingly, the pastors were, as a group, more progressive than their collective congregations. If the question had been asked in terms of liberality, our six pastors ranged from "Centrist" to "Quite Progressive."

Graph 4: Personal Religious Conservatism / Congregational Religious Conservatism



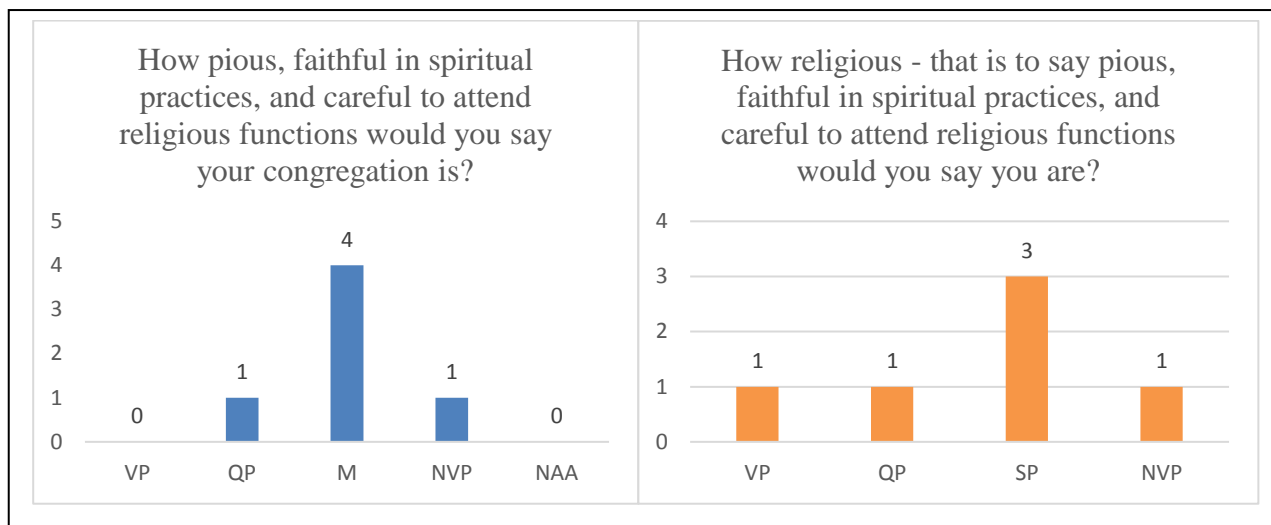
KEY: Far below average—Far above average

KEY: Far below average—Far above average

Pastors were also asked to self-assess how religious or pious (that is to say, how faithful in spiritual practices and interested in spiritual functions) they were compared to their congregations or assigned ministries. Initial responses are graphed below where an interesting anomaly emerges: although the answers to these demographic questions should have been stable, some pastors reported greater piety both for themselves and their congregations after the group process. It's not clear why.

None of the pastors classified themselves as religiously conservative (one self-described as “moderate,” two as “moderately progressive,” and three as “progressive”). Ministry situations or church settings were adjudicated by the pastor-participants as more conservative than they themselves generally were, and less pious overall. Politically, two self-described as Independents and four as Democrats. The group was evenly split between those who identified as “Evangelical Adventist” and “Progressive Adventist.” Survey responses were consistent insofar as those who identified as less conservative also identified as “Progressive.” In the questionnaire, “conservatism” was not defined.

Graph 5. Personal and Congregational Piety



VP = Very Pious-**QP**=Quite Pious / **M**= Mixed / **NVP** =Not Very Pious-**NAA**= Not At All Pious

General Observations

With regard to specific survey questions, aggregate results may be misleading. One or two individuals might shift significantly, while others did not shift at all. Meaningful movement on the part of one or two participants within a question may get mention. “Significant results” will be understood to include movement across the majority of participants. “Important results” will involve positive movement for half the group. Group size was not sufficient to conduct statistical analysis. Comparative results are reported with accompanying data.

This analysis was based on the responses of six respondents who answered questions in the pre-test and post-test. No statistical tests were performed as the sample size was simply too small. The analysis that follows in the next chapter describes demographic information via graphs, charts, and descriptions, with notation of any pre- or post-survey changes.

Summary

This dissertation is primarily a curricular effort responsive to the question of why information on the age of the Anthropocene and the pending sixth great extinction event has not

been transformative. Methods, hermeneutics, pedagogies, and practices intended to bypass political, social, and theological barriers presented in the key conversations of the previous chapter serve to inform a small group curriculum. Informed and outsider leadership offered expertise, facilitated conversation, and helped navigate group safety. Co-participation offered a substantive role for pastors who volunteered not as subjects, but as partners.

The curricular effort was to be evaluated primary through in vivo coding and the explanatory schema that arises from this coding. From the Introductory Session through the final Focus Group Evaluative Session, recordings yielded transcripts. These, along with transcripts from the mid-session check-ins, journaling, and assignments made up the data to be coded.

Supplementing the curricular effort and designed as a means to offer objective data pre-TSGPP and post-TSGPP was a survey offered before and after the TSGPP. This survey focused on attitudes and practices around ecological literacy and education; social justice issues around farming and labor; Sabbath as an ecological practice; and individual practices. Together, these data-gathering strategies represent a mixed-method, action research practical theological effort.

The setting of this work took place online and modeled adaptive scholarship. While this curriculum was intended to be a seminar-style gathering in a conference or seminar room, it morphed into a fully online process. This proved advantageous for creating a co-creative, co-participatory feeling in the group's work, which was undertaken at times workable for all participants.

Implementation of the curriculum was realized in a small group process with six pastors, all self-selecting for participation in this study. Demographically, there were two women and four men; three Evangelical Adventists and three progressive Adventists; three Four Democrats and two Independents; and collectively, all participants were more progressive than their

respective churches. Ages ranged from the twenties to the sixties. While piety was considered, this self-reported demographic item shifted. Overall, piety increased between the before and after surveys. The study group was too small to develop statistically significant data.

Chapter 6 – Results

Information about our present ecological/environmental crisis has not proven transformative, specifically in the Adventist context. The question as to why this is so formed the basis of chapter three. Chapter four entered into dialogue with select key thinkers outside Evangelicalism, many doing practical theology to identify theories, pedagogies, and practices that have the potential to overcome or circumvent political, social, and theological barriers. Extant ecological curricular resources for small groups, particularly those used in religious settings, were used to mine pedagogical choices. Overcoming theological, political, and other barriers to an Adventist ecotheology and praxis, in dialogue with these thinkers and curricula, guided the design of the intervention described in chapter five.

This chapter will look at the Pre-TSGPP and Post-TSGPP Survey results as well as key findings developed through sixteen-plus (16+) hours of time with each participant translated into three hundred-plus (300+) pages of transcription (data), which was all coded, and from which several schemas emerged. In short, there are too many stories to recount here, including multiple themes with potential that had to be set aside. The core research question examines “transformation.” Was this small group pilot project with its unique curriculum and varied pedagogies “transformational?”

The answer is as complex as the participants themselves, with all attending knowledges and histories. No two backgrounds, stories, or life experiences were the same. Participants brought a range of viewpoints. Some participants had a wealth of ecological knowledge and experience to begin with; others showed up ready to engage and learn. “Transformation,” then, if looked at through the lens of shifts in perspective, issue to issue, varied from participant to participant. What emerged from our shared experience was truly amazing. I could not have asked

for more thoughtful, engaged, or generous pastor-participant partners in this journey. Footnotes citing participants use “P” to designate “Pastor”, a number to designate the pastor by coded key, a session designation (“Intro” for “Introductory” session; “I” for “Individual” session; and “S” for group “Session” with a transcript page number.

What is offered here by way of analysis is not always linear. Rather, analysis pursues a logic inherent in the schema that emerged from in vivo coding. Considerable evidence of change, of movement, and a turning toward the natural world due, at least in part, to the processes embedded in the project were observed. At the core, the named and emergent “barriers to ecology and ecotheology” and responses to these create a cohesive narrative. The findings cluster around four primary emergent ideas, ubiquitous throughout: Fear, Fatigue, Futility, and Facility.

Fear

“Fear” is paralyzing, posing a very real challenge and barrier to an Adventist ecotheology and praxis. I have identified barriers to ecology and ecotheology under this rubric of “fear,” though barriers have also been brought to light out of the small group process. From hermeneutics to theology, national politics to internal politics, there are reasons to be circumspect and cautious. To be clear, I am not speaking of irrationality, phobias, or any kind of proclivity to psychological weakness. Ecology is a thoroughly politicized topic, and that fact came up frequently, despite a curriculum designed to be deliberately apolitical.

Emergent Fears in Group Process: Practical theology done utilizing qualitative methods takes detail and artifact seriously, and for good reason. While it was tempting to skip over the formalities and banter of each encounter, coding them revealed important dynamics around fear and the issue of safety. The context of sitting with pastoral peers discussing ecology and

theology, these two politically charged subjects on which our society-at-large and church communities are divided, was presumably not neutral.

Arousal of suspicion and reserve (which for purposes here will be categorized under “fear”) began with the *Informed Consent* document itself. When risks are highlighted for a potential participant, including risks not anticipated to be realized or those expected to be realized given the topic of the study or nature of the trial, it raises the question, “What are we in for?”

In our opening minutes, one pastor quipped, “We’ll see how tough Brother Greg will be on us, and then we’ll see if it’s fun or not,”⁵⁰⁷ drawing laughter from the group. As they reviewed the *Informed Consent* document, another pastor asked quizzically, “is the material we’re going to discuss so sensitive in some way that there is serious risk denominationally? Or where do you see the risks being?”⁵⁰⁸ Another pastor agreed the risks were low, mostly because the group would be centered around “some of the most consequential kinds of discussions that we can have,”⁵⁰⁹ though not “on the radar of Conference administrators.”⁵¹⁰

After a bit more dialogue on how confidential the discussion needed to be, underlying suspicions and fears emerged more vividly. Speaking of previous experiences about health and expectations around the transformational nature of that information and process, one pastor voiced the concern they were being sold something, that there was “an agenda to convert”⁵¹¹ and that through the process, if someone was not converted, there might be “passive judgment.”⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁷ P2 Intro 3 (Pastor 2, Introductory Session, page 3 of the transcript).

⁵⁰⁸ P3 Intro 14.

⁵⁰⁹ P4 Intro 15.

⁵¹⁰ P4 Intro 15.

⁵¹¹ P6 Intro 16.

⁵¹² P6 Intro 16.

This pastor went on to say that the thought of being judged was uncomfortable, which was self-reportedly “rooted in the fear that I don’t like people looking bad at me.”⁵¹³

Concerns about meeting researcher needs also emerged from several voices. While this presented as affable flexibility, it also hinted at anxiety at the openness of the structure and the need for clear direction. Pastors are hardwired to please.

In the one-on-one check-ins, assurance of the confidentiality of the session was affirmed, but I asked if it was all right to share, if in the course of group discussion, something arose that could be enhanced by anonymous reference to what the individual had shared. In response, one pastor expressed appreciation for the confidentiality process and indicated he collectively gave even more time and energy than he was expecting to that process.⁵¹⁴ Things were good. Another answer revealed an underlying reserve, “I haven’t said anything damaging or risky or crazy.”⁵¹⁵ Despite confidentiality and self-monitoring, care with words was clearly a deeply engrained practice, a survival technique.

In the individual check-ins, each participant was asked if there was anything they wanted to ask or share. What emerged in two cases began with a self-assuring reference to group confidentiality followed by an open, even confessional stance. One pastor was not feeling *unsafe* in the group, but personally had no additional energies with which to explain his perspective if questioned in any way. “[T]heological openness ... openness about uncertainty, about the future, and all of that” came up. “It’s something that’s hard to talk [about] with very many people at all, because it’s very much not safe to do so.”⁵¹⁶ A moment of sacred confession.

⁵¹³ P6 Intro 16.

⁵¹⁴ P2 I 4.

⁵¹⁵ P3 I-2 4.

⁵¹⁶ P5 I 7.

It is hard to have real conversations about theology in the Adventist context. The most compelling reason is avoiding those who will take any opportunity to judge, harass, harangue, incite, and stir up controversy or trouble in a church or community over perceived heterodoxies or areas of uncertainty. Fundamentalism does this. Pastors work hard to avoid controversy and the “Adventist Taliban.”⁵¹⁷ To speak of “bad theology,” or to express doubts about Adventist eschatological schemas, the nature of life eternal and what heaven will be like, or the age of the Earth and the mechanisms and timing of creation is risky. How a pastor might work with doctrines one does not fully agree with or has some ambiguity around is of concern. Deviations can be damaging to reputations, even careers.

What is revealing here is the high importance of safety to doing ecological work in a theological context. A group formed, and for three sessions we discussed, revisited, and then reminded one another of our agreements. We covenanted to honor one another by listening, engaging, and maintaining confidentiality in terms of who was involved and what individuals said. Individual sessions provided an additional layer of comfort to move into a confessional place to share more deeply, a pastoral space of listening and encouraging this journey. Openness is a stance from which deep theological thinking, ecological integration, and transformative inner work, shifts, and change begin to really happen.

Another key finding here is the importance of leadership in the way in which processes honor and protect those who participate in them. Respectful engagement is always good. Excellent listening skills are even more desirable. Encouraging a participant by standing with

⁵¹⁷ A reference to my own term for anti-institutional Adventist ultra-conservative religious Fundamentalists who seek to destroy individuals and communities over variations in doctrinal understanding they do not see as orthodox, or as supporting policy or social actions they approve of.

them in the struggle to make meaning, to gently coach through careful questions to see something in a new and different way, this is important, too. In the end, the absence of judgment may be best. Here is the way one pastor summarized the experience in the focus group:

“It's funny how this topic can often be one of just internal frustration, maybe, or guilt or whatever it may be. But through this setting, it was both I think, influential, inspiring, but also healing a bit because we were able (or I for once was able) to discuss and process this topic with a group of other people. It's almost as if you allowed us to have church around this topic... It's been a wonderful experience for that reason, and I think it's inspiring to show the power of church, the power of pastoral ministry, the power of what we do. Look at how something that has previously been just a source of tension in my life could become a source of beauty in my life, just when you had six other individuals, and a competent leader. Thank you for pastoring us through this.”⁵¹⁸

The small group dynamic, safe and competently led, is a key to creating space for conversation, sharing information, and opening to the possibility of a different way to think, believe, and even live.

Fatigue

“Fatigue” speaks to the nearly constant state experienced in modern life. There is a reason Steve Jobs wore the same kind of blue jeans, black turtleneck, and shoes every day. He famously wanted to limit the number of pointless decisions he had to make, knowing he could only make so many decisions effectively. We are tired of making decisions, and there are too many to make. Adding ecological thinking as a layer in choice-making can be complexifying, at least at first. If there is awareness of complicity, it is hard not to feel tired of the way complicity makes us feel. We are weary of having to care for one more thing. It feels heavy, and so we find ways not to care.

Sometimes fatigue is born of a desire to see things in black and white in a grey world. Some of us have been raised with a terrible fear of getting it wrong. Actually, fears are

⁵¹⁸ P1 S5 11,12.

themselves wearying. There are so many personal, family, home, and work problems to solve! Adding global issues, even local ones, can be exhausting. Thinking ecologically can cycle into a consuming obsession, an “eco-legalism” that can deprive us of a sense that it is okay to live and let others make their own choices too. Obsession can keep us from rest or the ability to relax and recreate. And time is always a factor. Who actually has time or energy for one more cause?

Compassion Fatigue: This phenomenon of indifference, induced by repeated exposure and creating desensitization, stands as a significant (and heretofore unmentioned) barrier to ecological thinking and praxis. In the context of a story about empathy for the presumably millions of creatures that died in 2020 as over 5% of California burned in the worst fire season on record, the pastor being interviewed said, “There’s too much compassion fatigue. So much fatigue of all sorts.”⁵¹⁹ This pastor went on to say:

“We need to prioritize what things are going to bring us down and discourage us. It’s easier to tune out ice caps melting, coral reefs disappearing, what’s happening in my environment and prioritize what is going to be my ‘Debbie Downer’ moment for the day because, I don’t need more! We don’t need one more thing to carry on our shoulders. It’s so easy to just put the earth on the back burner in the grand scheme of things.”⁵²⁰

Of course! “Compassion fatigue” is also known as “secondary traumatic stress” (STS) and is related to PTSD.⁵²¹ It is common in caregivers in a variety of professions. It is also related to high levels of media exposure, as discussed in a 1996 article on compassion fatigue as “a phenomenon associated with pervasive communication about social problems.”⁵²² One might

⁵¹⁹ P6 I 8.

⁵²⁰ P6 I 3.

⁵²¹ “American Institute of Stress,” Compassion Fatigue, 2020, <https://www.stress.org/military/for-practitionersleaders/compassion-fatigue>.

⁵²² Katherine N. Kinnick, Dean M. Krugman, and Glen T. Cameron, “Compassion Fatigue: Communication and Burnout Toward Social Problems,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (August 1996): 687, <https://doi.org/DOI:10.1177/107769909607300314>.

add “environmental” problems, though the politics of doing so add additional layers of dialogue, diatribe, and commentary on political paralysis.

If there was compassion fatigue with media in 1996, it has become exponentially more pervasive now. Social media did not exist in 1996. This term and its embedded insights translate to environmental issues and catastrophes, human and animal suffering, and the constancy of the demands we care about one thing or another. Fatigue is how we navigate the news: another outrageous or dangerous Trump tweet; a new oil spill; another unarmed Black teen murdered by a White cop or a gay college student killed in a hazing “accident;” families walking to America from Honduras seeking safety and hope; or even entire peoples being forced out of their cities, lands, and countries by war, poverty, disease, drought, and desperation. The cumulative demands on our empathetic response mechanisms have overwhelmed us, even broken us.

Overstimulated by years of exposure to all of the above, this pastor-participant just could not find compassion for species extinctions. Professionally versed in questions of diet, health, environment; working through ministry issues and concerns and the care of parishioners; all that goes with being married, caring for an infant, and trying to make life work; it was too much. This fact brought fatigue to the foreground.

This revelation is a direct result of the TSGPP. People care, but they have too much to care for and about. Weariness comes from the ongoing trauma of empathy without intervention and cure. How then, to find rest?

Politics: It is becoming clear that a whole book might be written on the politics of ecology and ecotheology within the Adventist world. Despite the total absence of politics *per se* from the curriculum, politics came up over and over. The contrast between two separate conversations with two different pastors elucidates core issues. In the conversations, one pastor

expressed frustration with the intersection of politics and the environment evidenced in the 2020 Vice-Presidential debates, noting the greater problem of suffering. The moderator could not get then Vice-President Mike Pence to agree that anthropogenic climate change was a “threat to all of humanity” not because of science, but because of politics. This pastor felt that “climate change is something that is causing human suffering and will only cause further human suffering as the generations go, and that’s not a political statement. It’s just a fact.”⁵²³ Politics divorced from fact or indifferent to suffering were inadequate.

Another pastor was very ready to admit that “there is significant damage done by humans ... that humans do play a significant role.”⁵²⁴ Humans have culpability. The appeal was to complexity,⁵²⁵ something I chose to revisit and ask more about. I think the energy of the pastor’s words aimed at nuance for the sake of honest accuracy, but it still felt as if what was voiced more broadly reflected Evangelical and conservative political views, particularly since the subtext was the climate of indecency in political rhetoric and “political correctness,” a term actually invoked.⁵²⁶

I pushed a bit. The response was strong and insightful. The pastor explained that there’s a current, a directional flow, and if you go with that, fine. But if you move against it, there’s stigmatization, which “builds tension” and momentum can be reversed “as we saw with 2016.”⁵²⁷ At some point, people push back and “the battle is lost, any kind of progress toward educating people.” The essential point was that people in tension go into self-protective mode.

⁵²³ P1 I 7.

⁵²⁴ P2 I 3, 4.

⁵²⁵ See dissertation page 97 for a discussion of this form of resistance.

⁵²⁶ P2 I 3, 4.

⁵²⁷ P2 I 3, 4.

This area of politics also touches on compassion fatigue. One pastor, once very involved in preaching the merits of “conservation and preservation, and proactive measures, and Earth, and farming, and farm-to-table, and food ... felt like people started twitching” at the topic.⁵²⁸ People were “turned off,” “zoned out with eyes glazed over,” and “very shut down.”⁵²⁹ The topic is “very polarizing” even if the presenter is careful.⁵³⁰ Thoughtful admonitions are seen as acts of shaming. No wonder our churches are not preaching the gospel of green!

General Fatigue: Not only are our empathetic response systems been over-taxed, our bodies, minds, and spirits feel overspent, too. Every pastor in this group serves in an urban setting where the demands are constant. They all are married, five of the six with children. Some have considerable commutes. At least half have working spouses.

In addition to the normal stresses of ministry, these pastors were all dealing with fallout from the pandemic, including economic threats of decreased tithe income and congregant division along political party lines as to how the church ought to respond to city, county, state, and federal guidelines regarding the use of masks, social distancing, and sanitizing procedures.⁵³¹ Participant pastors reported spending countless hours in home office chairs on the internet, working from home or church office, conducting business by Zoom. To this was added the investment of between eighteen 18 and 24 hours over a period of three weeks in the late fall of 2020, right after the second major surge of the pandemic.

⁵²⁸ P6 I 5.

⁵²⁹ P6 I 5.

⁵³⁰ P6 I 5.

⁵³¹ For future readers, this study was been conducted in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which technically started in the fall of 2019 and caused the closure of churches as early as March 2020.

One pastor reported that it is not uncommon to be online meeting people virtually twelve hours a day.⁵³² Another, during the one-on-one check-in, had pulled to the side of the road for safety, words running on into unfinished sentences or sentence-strand clusters. To be clear, this pastor is truly articulate and thoughtful! Nevertheless, fatigue presented itself that afternoon in a succession of big yawns and the struggle, at moments, for verbal coherence.

It is not that pastors in particular and people in general do not care about the environment. They do, but the very little tiny bit of energy available to deal with the question quickly gets consumed, lost in life's demands, the hurry, the stress, the overwhelming number of decisions that must be made, and the facts of complicity and complexity. Change and impact take time, particularly in congregational life. People fear making poor choices, and, with this fear comes what might be desperation for clear, practical guidance toward additional sacrifices. So how does one "plow through to that point of making a difference?"⁵³³

Guidance: There was a palpable sense that at least a few participants, particularly those with practical mindsets, were hoping to draw on facilitator expertise to navigate the complexities and avoid the complicities. One pastor spoke for many, saying, "I don't have all the answers, that's why we're here."⁵³⁴ This largely seemed to be a function of a psychological orientation toward problem-solving. Another pastor noted, "I naturally approach challenges from a very ... concrete, black-and-white view. Sometimes that's good and sometimes that leaves out a whole lot of nuance that's necessary."⁵³⁵ This same pastor seemed to be processing questions on creation care in a very binary way. "Was Sabbath made for humanity, or humanity for Sabbath?

⁵³² P2 I 11.

⁵³³ P6 I 12.

⁵³⁴ P3 S2 10.

⁵³⁵ P1 02 7.

Was the earth made for humans, or were humans made to care for the earth?” This tension based in “either/or” thinking may get resolved unfavorably. Living in the tension of the “both/and” may allow for a broader range of responses, but not everyone is wired this way or has the energy to sustain the tension. This is an interesting finding because to be “ecological” in this culture is not a given, even for the most careful among us. As has been discussed, complicity in almost every aspect of Western life requires a constant engagement of better/worse, not right/wrong.

Futility

“Futility” speaks to deep beliefs, attitudes of indifference or complacency. The word is profoundly descriptive, naming our perceived helplessness in the face of apocalypse—those places where the earth might be ending now before our very eyes. It is emotive, for a lack of sense of agency can lead to passivity, inactivity, resignation, depression, and the feeling that there is simply no point. The inescapable facts of the complicity of the Western lifestyle in the ruin of the planet in daily acts of eating and living meet in this concept.

Both ecological optimism and pessimism arise from this same root of futility. When choices are not clearly beneficial or detrimental but gradated, the lack of clear choices can stall one’s momentum and bleed one’s energies. Ambivalence driven by ambiguity can lead to an agitated sense of futility. And, of course, as a species we are small; individually, we are just a micro-blip in the larger planetary picture.

Questions of “futility” are difficult to answer, particularly when evidences point to irreparable and irreversible global ecological damage. That a nascent pessimism was voiced regarding the trajectory and outcome of our ecological situation was not a surprise. In discussing

plastics in the oceans,⁵³⁶ for example, one pastor noted the ways in which ocean plastics had broken down into microplastics and were a part now of all the oceans and in all we eat.⁵³⁷

Ecological Optimism: One of the profound means by which futility was evidenced emerged as I reflected on the contexts of ecological “optimism.” It is impossible to say if the “messiah of technology” may have emerged in our conversations as a means to hold onto hope. It may be there is real faith that civilization can continue on as it has, as new, more efficient technologies emerge that can reverse ecological damage.

The TSGPP included a full session on “eschatology,” looking at where the world was ending around us. The presentation traced and named the myriad ways eating a can of FriChik⁵³⁸ evidenced the problem. Having observed the impressive extraction, manufacturing, and transportation technologies featured in the PowerPoint and embedded video, one pastor’s response was as follows:

I’ve always been so impressed by human ingenuity! ... I just feel hopeful that if we could channel our energies in a different direction, the ingenuity that we could gather towards reversing some of these processes and be able to create a sustainable way of moving forward. So I’m hopeful.⁵³⁹

Another pastor agreed:

“If we have the ability to create these systems to mine and produce and distribute coal, who’s to say we can’t do the same, if not even better, for renewable sources of energy? ... who’s to say that we can’t continue to be innovative and be more environmentally conscious and socially conscious as well?”⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁶ See “Ocean Trash: 5.25 Trillion Pieces and Counting, but Big Questions Remain,” Education, National Geographic, February 22, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/article/ocean-trash-525-trillion-pieces-and-counting-big-questions-remain/>.

⁵³⁷ P4 S2 4.

⁵³⁸ FriChik is a spun and textured soy product, a trademarked food produced by Loma Linda Foods, owned and operated by Atlantic Natural Foods in Nashville, NC. What is true of FriChik in this case could be said of most any canned soy product.

⁵³⁹ P5 S3 35.

⁵⁴⁰ P1 S3 35.

Out of despair and environmental ruin on a grand scale ... emerges hope. I would not have predicted it, but there it was. Why? Certainly, there are those who see a modern messiah in technology, but perhaps acceleration toward more tech is not the way.

Along these lines, another pastor offered a story of change, complexification, and complicity. Tech might not mean more time, or leisure, or efficiency, particularly if one has to work longer hours and more days to purchase technologies. “Those are the things (complexifications) we have to look at and ponder ... whether or not we’re ready to either go the other way (direction of technology) or combine some of what (the technologies) we have with some of what existed prior to the industrialization era.”⁵⁴¹ Beware the messiah of technology.

Ecological optimism conversationally took on the façade of resilience. While there is no question society needs to raise highly resilient children going forward, these comments moved in an unexpected direction:

When you asked me, “What are you going to tell (participant’s child) when she’s looking at a picture book and there’s a whale that no longer exists...?” My immediate reaction wasn’t this overwhelming sadness ... but it was more, “What do you do with the tools that you have and (how do you) use them well, despite the circumstances around you?” How are we raising resilient people to not be bogged down and let down mentally by the destruction and evil around us, but (who) remain firm, trust in Mother Earth—really partner with her so that we have a favorable outcome, so that we remain positive and resilient?⁵⁴²

One resonates with the positivity and utter practicality of such an answer, and yet, for reasons far beyond the scope of this dissertation, we are not raising more resilient children. In ecological terms, the absence of exposure to nature has created what Richard Louv terms “nature-deficit disorder.” This idea was raised by another pastor in this study who was intrigued and offered it as a cue for ecological education.⁵⁴³ Humans do not thrive in the absence of living green foliage,

⁵⁴¹ P2 S3 35.

⁵⁴² P6 S4-1 24.

⁵⁴³ P5 S5 11.

birds and insects, worms, reptiles, mammals, and healthy oceans teeming with all manner of life. Children raised apart from the natural world may not be as resilient.

Ecological optimism may prove not to be any more useful than ecological pessimism. Functionally, the loci of hope and control are outside the self and function similarly to escapist eschatologies. Further, raising children is not a solitary pursuit but rather a communal one, heavily impacted by the surrounding culture(s). The desired quality of resilience, even if deliberately cultured, cannot be guaranteed.

Optimism may manifest best in simply doing what one can, “thinking smaller to make a bigger impact.”⁵⁴⁴ This is very practical advice, perhaps all that most of us will ever be able to do. I see this form of ecological optimism as generative and connected to grounded hope primarily because it takes personal agency seriously. Even so, doing “what we can” is limited by our energies, empathies, vision, available resources, levels of socio-political influence, and myriad circumstances and factors.

Ecological Pessimism⁵⁴⁵: Ecological pessimism is inextricably connected to a sense of futility. A sense of futility around ecological themes emerged again and again in the course of the TSGPP, along with fatigue, fear, extant facility, and developing facilities. These did not present as stages but rather as dynamics that might emerge at any time. For example, while discussing doing the equivalent of a neighborhood prayer walk over local environmental hotspots or areas at particular risk, a couple of pastors voiced doubts. The first said,

“The consequences of our wrongdoing are not changed just by prayer. I ... cannot think of one (example) in the scriptures when someone just messes things up intentionally and then says, “Lord, would you take care of this mess?” The Lord comes in and says, “Okay, here it is. I fixed it for you.” ... I doubt that the plastic in the ocean would vanish just by

⁵⁴⁴ P6 S3 39.

⁵⁴⁵ P6 I 3, A term I hadn’t heard or registered before, used by this anonymous pastor.

having 40 days of fasting and prayer. I doubt that the hills will spring with beautiful life just by having an hour of prayer and fellowship once a week at our churches.”⁵⁴⁶

The second added: “You bring up plastics in the ocean and I think so much of that is well beyond our capacity to do anything about, either as individuals or as a planetary response... There is so much damage that has already been done that there is almost a sense of futility with some of these huge problems. How do we clean it up? It is so pervasive.”⁵⁴⁷

Both these quotes speak of a deep ecological, even theological pessimism. The first questions the efficacy of environmental prayer and God’s willingness, interest, or ability to fix what we have messed up environmentally. Even so, Adventist soteriology and eschatology suggest Christ fixes (redeems, restores) that which humanity messed up.

The “tragedy of the commons” presented a matrix for processing what another pastor, who expressed a sense of futility, said this way: “If we can convince ourselves and then others that our actions alone do make a difference, then that’s one huge step in the process because it’s so easy ... to think ‘I’m too small.’ What does it matter if I eat my soy ... if I cast a vote because I’m just one person? Tragedy of the commons. That’s, I think, a big hurdle for me.”⁵⁴⁸

Perhaps the most direct comment illustrating the deep ecological pessimism identified in this dissertation was this, on the topic of global warming:

“My takeaway is that there are efforts, but it's not necessarily getting better. There are only so many efforts that will slow down the process of the decay that we're seeing, global warming efforts, and all of that. What I'm exposed to is ... very pessimistic. It's very fatalistic. There's really no solution. Just a slowing down of what will ultimately become the destruction of the world by men and women.”⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁶ P3 S2 4.

⁵⁴⁷ P4 S2 4.

⁵⁴⁸ P1 S2 39.

⁵⁴⁹ P6 I 3.

This theme highlights the connection to apocalypticism, for if there's no human solution, no divine interference facilitated through prayer, it's both easy and expedient to cast oneself upon the hopes of the eschaton.

Generational Concerns & Considerations

The question of generations and generational concerns wove throughout the entire group process. In the introductory session, one young parent of an infant worried about an anomaly raised in a pediatric appointment with another young parent, who was able to listen and lower the level of anxiety by relating stories of their children's health issues and how these were eventually outgrown. Storytelling and permission to be "freaked out" normalized both the trauma of the issue and the stress and anxiety that accompanies journeys to wellness.

The future of these generations considers the ecological subtext regarding how their world might look and how might we ecologically shape that world now. As one participant put it: "I am aware of the choices that are before me in relation to preserving the environment for ... future generations, maybe even my own grandkids. I feel this burden and responsibility to respond to that in a good way. I'm just still discovering what that good way is ... future generations are naturally the responsibility of the previous generations."⁵⁵⁰

The question of an Adventist movement toward creation care is also certainly about generational retention in the future church. One participant's young spouse was the inspiration and catalyst for ecological interest and participation.⁵⁵¹ Another pastor shared how their adult children, raised vegetarian, had migrated away from active church life in part because the church was not deemed relevant on key social and environmental issues. Though there is a legalistic

⁵⁵⁰ P1 S4-1 10, 11.

⁵⁵¹ P1 I 5.

connection between veganism and sanctification within strains of Adventism, these young adults still adopted the stricter dietary standards of veganism. The reason? Water consumption involved in dairy production.⁵⁵²

To be an Adventist Christian wrestling with the question of future generations bears inherent tensions. First, we are raising a generation of young adults who, for ecological and other reasons, are considering not having families.⁵⁵³ Second, those having offspring hope they thrive, the definition of which may bring into question the health of both church and environment, and questions as to why one has not engaged the other. Third, what to do with eschatological beliefs based on Bible prophecies that predict an inevitable end and the renewal of all things? Lastly, missiological ambitions are presently challenged by postmodern sensibilities. The struggle for missional resolution was voiced by one pastor this way:

The pendulum has swung ... the idea of wanting to share a particular set of beliefs about God and try to win people and baptize them has now defaulted over to “What can we do in the community? What can we do to make a difference? Let's fight human trafficking, or giving backpacks to the kids,” or whatever else we come up with. I worry about it ... I fully agree with being in this world, in this kingdom, building the kingdom, rectifying evil and casting demons out wherever we can. I agree with all of that! How to not lose the other mission that we have along the way and to make friends for Jesus everywhere we can, and to eradicate the lies that have been said about God, how to have a synthesis of all of those, someone's going to have to help figure that out. The pendulum has swung.⁵⁵⁴

The participant identified this shift as essentially a movement toward post-modernism.

This same pastor mourned the state of the church. Everywhere, in all previous parishes, there was evidence of decline.⁵⁵⁵ While lovingly affirming younger generations of pastors, their apparent lack of concern for baptisms, the rejection (and even open mocking) of evangelism, and

⁵⁵² P4 S1 34.

⁵⁵³ P4 S5 23.

⁵⁵⁴ P3 I-2 12-13.

⁵⁵⁵ P3 I-2 9.

the dearth of people in church services calls to question the future of a church intent on community service and social causes. In this same interview, this pastor opined that liberal churches embracing liberal causes and theologies (social gospel) do not grow. Citing Dean Kelley's 1972 book, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*, this pastor named an internalized fear and resistance to ecotheology, noting that Adventism has not "gone down the road of the big mainline churches ... preaching about Rwanda's battles or (Presbyterians) sending money ... to social causes around the world ... Those churches lost their power in the world, the lost members."⁵⁵⁶

Behind this pastor's obvious willingness to sign up, engagement with the process, and clearly documentable shifts in survey responses, this pastor's conflicting values and sources of authoritative information related to generational issues and underlying fears. This pastor is not alone. Voice has been given to the uncertainty of mission in light of ecological collapse, and the fear that in addressing ecology, Adventists might be sacrificing something precious.

It is also descriptive of the inner work personally engaged. For the sake of beloved young colleagues, friends, and relatives who felt that "a theology of climate change would be the most impressive signal that the church is listening to the younger generation,"⁵⁵⁷ this pastor signed up, totally engaged, "wrestling" with the tensions hoping to learn enough to offer a real response "to the contemporary issues of climate change and environment,"⁵⁵⁸ despite misgivings and observed shifts. If we listen, we can hear the bewilderment, concern, self-doubt, perceived roadblocks, and also a genuine desire for generational continuity, community, a synthesis, an answer.

⁵⁵⁶ P3 I-2 7.

⁵⁵⁷ P3 I-1 1.

⁵⁵⁸ P3 S1 7.

What to do? Is Jesus relevant in the here and now? Or shall the next generations stand with the “nones,” declaring no religious affiliation? Can we move forward *ecologically*, *theologically*, *ecclesiologically*? Essentially, “is there a way to continue (to fulfill) the gospel commission and be socially active and be connected to the world at the same time?”⁵⁵⁹ This relates of course to Evangelical concerns already enumerated earlier in this chapter.

Biophilia

A love of nature comes from having looked within and found new community in all that lives. “Facility” looks like loving creation as God loves it. Biophilia drives a new sense of both inhabitation in one’s own back yard and in one’s broad environment—inclusive of all creatures that live there. Animal ethics and non-violence move in the directions of loving choices and newfound agency.

Most pastor-participants had experienced nature in some direct way and had experienced awe, wonder, even love, particularly when young. Religious Education must encourage parents to do all that is possible to make sure children have such experiences, to foster a high valuation of the natural world. As with religious values, ecological values are not learned so much at church or school, but in the home. This was illustrated through emergent narratives around encounters, experiences of one’s relationship with nature, revealing a profound love of the Earth, not of an abstraction or particularity, but a love of *place* both cosmic and contextual.

One story shared was of a camping trip on a river and the nighttime sky. This pastor remembered “looking at the incredibleness of the stars and (thinking) how big God is and how many stars there were ... how many we could see. And how small we were, but how loved we

⁵⁵⁹ P3 I-2 9.

were. It all just hit me in that moment.”⁵⁶⁰ Another described a mission trip to Micronesia, where the group did some snorkeling. “I will say as far as being overtaken by the beauty of nature, seeing one of those reefs and all the life that was underneath ... It took my breath away...! Absolutely stunning and gorgeous!”⁵⁶¹ A third story from a diver and beach lover spoke of the restorative value of pristine wild places.⁵⁶² Stories of family, place, gardens and gardening, local animals and their burrows, dens, nests ... stories of encounter with God in the majesty of the moment—these reveal a profound love for nature and the way in which the created world nurtures and sustains.

Biophilia is a necessary part of both theological and ecological renewal. The integrative power of loving nature is profound, for humans find themselves connected through awareness and love of all inhabitants. We come to understand our mutual contingency, which is all ultimately related to cosmic connection and contingency. God and creation are inextricably linked. Biophilia can foster an important theological/ecological integrating shift: The world isn’t owned by God ... the world belongs to God.

Environmental Facility

“Facility” implies increasing levels of confidence and competence. Herein, it refers to movements toward transformation. Facility is evidenced in gestures toward sacrificial ecology, particularly given rampant consumerism. It recognizes and navigates the complexities of interrelationality. Disciplines of Sabbath-keeping, prayer, silence, and other spiritual exercises maintain mindfulness and strengthen vision and resolve.

⁵⁶⁰ P5 S2 25.

⁵⁶¹ P1 S2 26.

⁵⁶² P3 S2 20.

“Facility” is also expressed in competencies around eco-praxis and the commitment of both personal and community resources in that direction. The pursuit of beauty, care for future generations, legacy, ethics, these important ideas and values reflect “facility.” The unending journey toward full transformation is about process, growing ecologically, each step yielding increased facility. In this space, we are witnesses, whether passively or actively so. We witness to the goodness of creation and the power of embodied redemption. We begin to shift not just ourselves, but our world.

Survey Results

It is in this category of “facility” that we see the clearest evidences of movement. While group dialogue, individual check-in interviews, journals, and so on, along with the coding done on these, produced evidences of movement, the pre-TSGPP and post-TSGPP surveys were particularly designed to capture change. In what follows, references to survey questions may be checked in Appendix B.

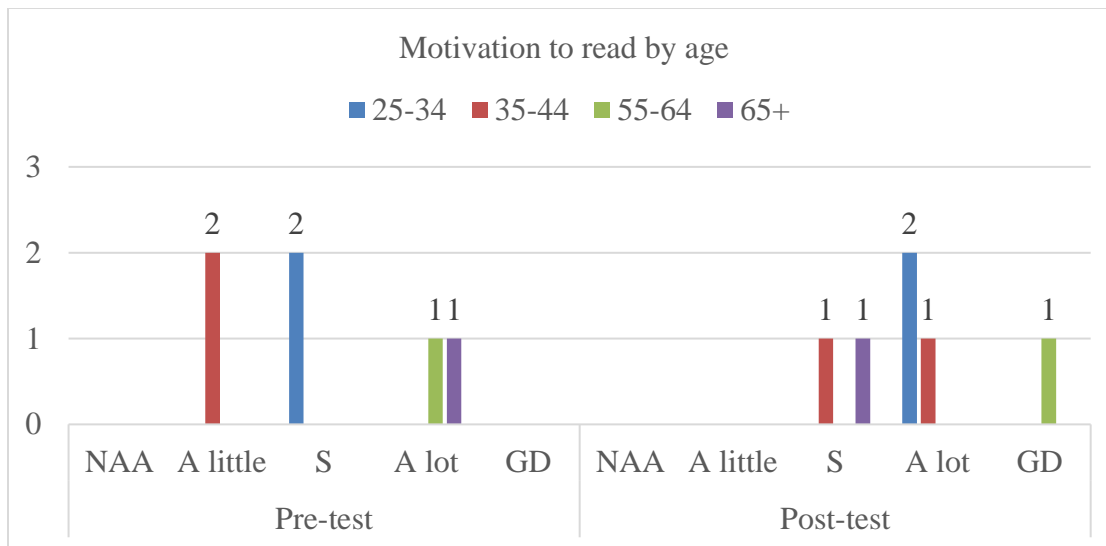
Reading and Preaching as Process and Mastery

Survey questions twenty to twenty-two were clustered. The three questions were about personal motivation to read; encouraging others to read, and willingness/motivation to communicate knowledge, in this case via preaching. Personal reading is an important component both of preparedness when confronted with alternative information and credibility when citing facts related to the topics of Earth stewardship; Green Movements; Earth Justice; Environmentalism; Ecology; Ecojustice; Animal Ethics; Species Preservation and Biodiversity; “Deep Ecology”; Climate Change/Global Warming; Ecotheology; Ecophilosophy; Ecofeminism; Deforestation; rising ocean levels; and/or acidification. Motivating or inspiring parishioners to read is important in helping members become informed and in making factual or spiritually

based decisions regarding their relationship to creation. Preaching hopefully evidences comfort with material learned and can motivate and inspire, helping people connect morality to daily living and apparently mundane acts done in the real world.

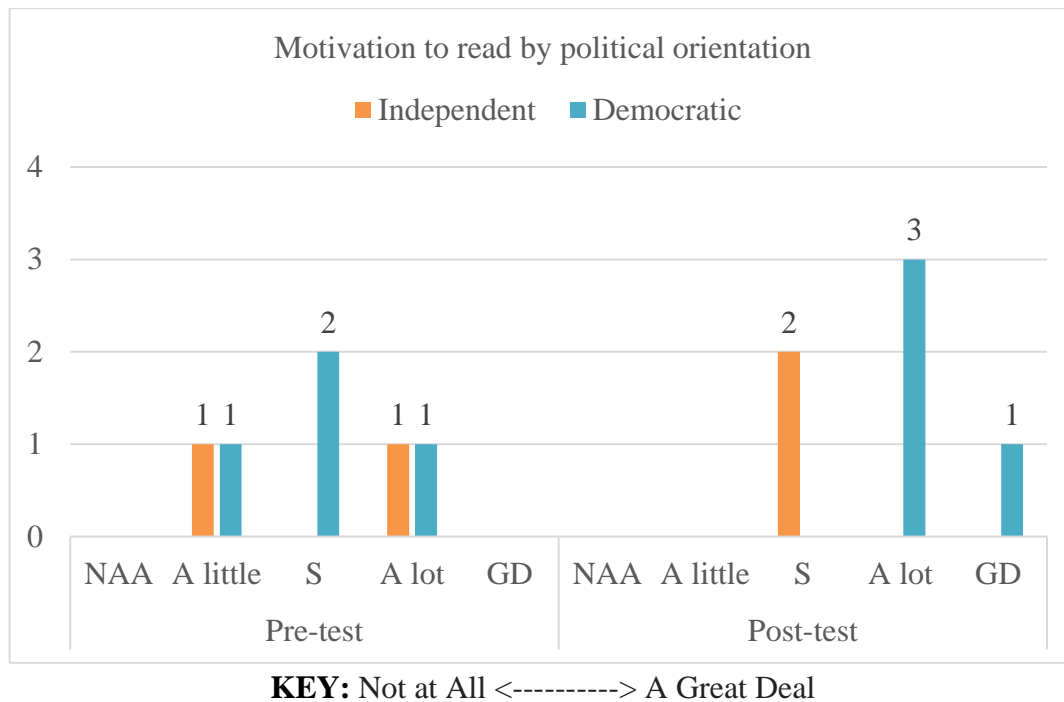
The surveys showed *significant* results for personal motivation to read and learn; all six participants reported increased motivation (Q20). Cluster movement was toward facility, if marginally so. Pastors were more motivated to increase personal knowledge by reading on the topics above than to encourage parishioners to read or to preach ecological themes. There was only the slightest movement in motivation to ask congregants to read in these areas. Finally, there was very little movement where preaching was concerned, as shown below.

Graph 6: *Motivation to Read and Learn More. Q20 by Age*

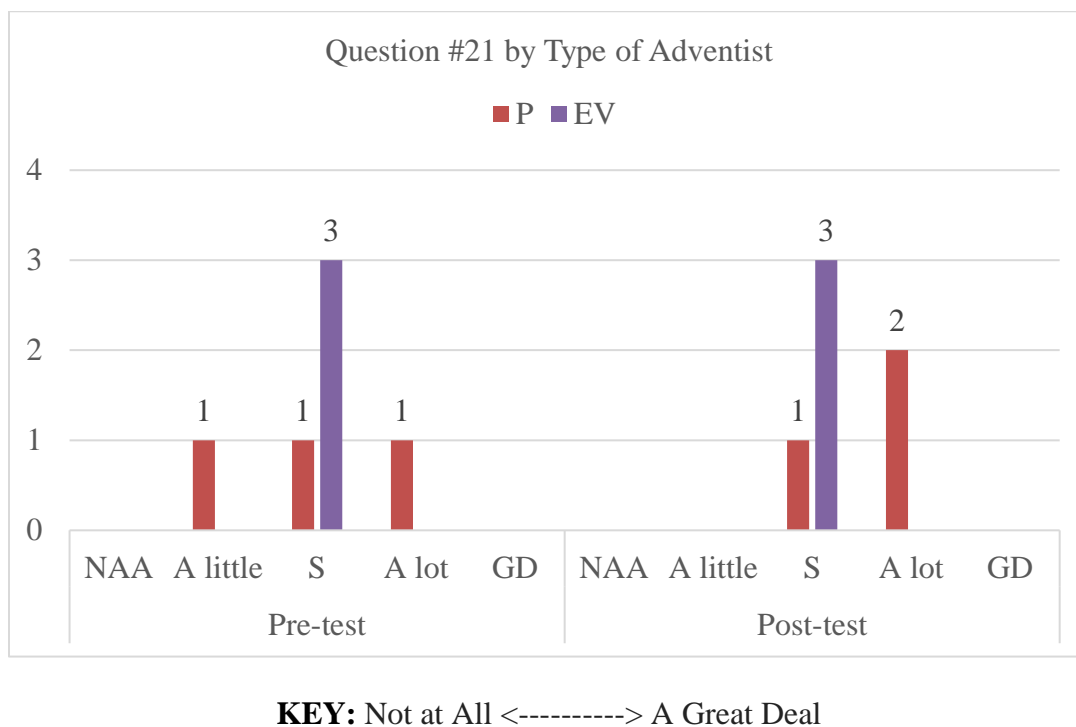


KEY: Not at All <-----> A Great Deal

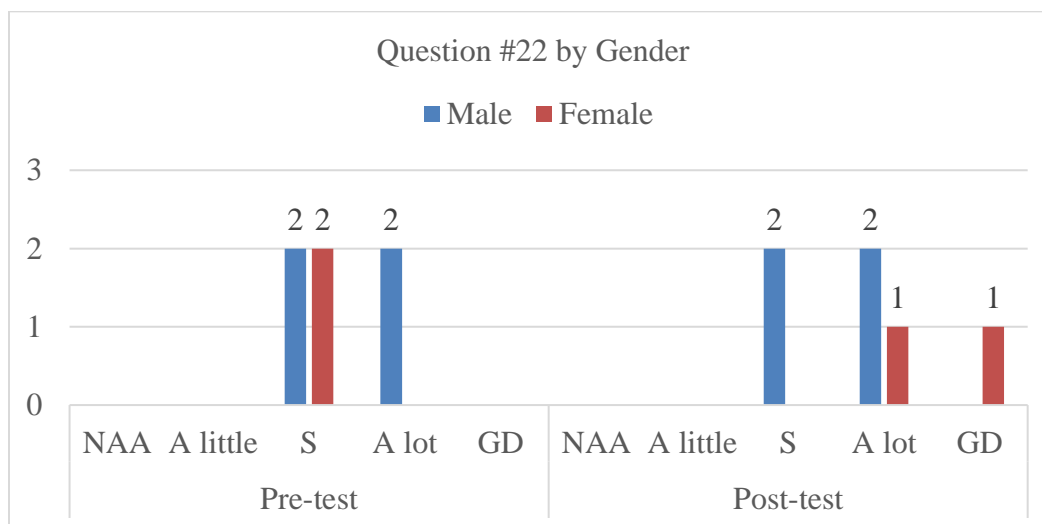
Graph 7: *Motivation to Read and Learn More. Q20 by Political Orientation*



Graph 8: *Motivation to encourage congregational ecological reading. Q20 by Type of Adventist*



Graph 9: Likelihood of Preaching Ecological Themes. Q22 by Gender



KEY: Not at All <-----> A Great Deal

Neither age nor party affiliation were factors (Graphs 6, 7). Democrats identifying as religious progressives shifted on this question, while Independent Evangelicals stayed the same (Graph 8). Women were more motivated than men to find ways to preach ecologically (Graph 9).

Part of the survey cluster above was designed to see what the intersection between personal conviction and congregational action might be. Survey results were not encouraging at first glance. One of the demographic questions offers a significant clue. At least four of the six pastors involved in this study are specialized, working under senior pastors, and they do not set preaching schedules or agendas, worship or liturgical themes, or otherwise construct the calendar of the church. Based on participant comments, absence of agency emerged as a significant reason why personal movement did not translate into corporate intentions.

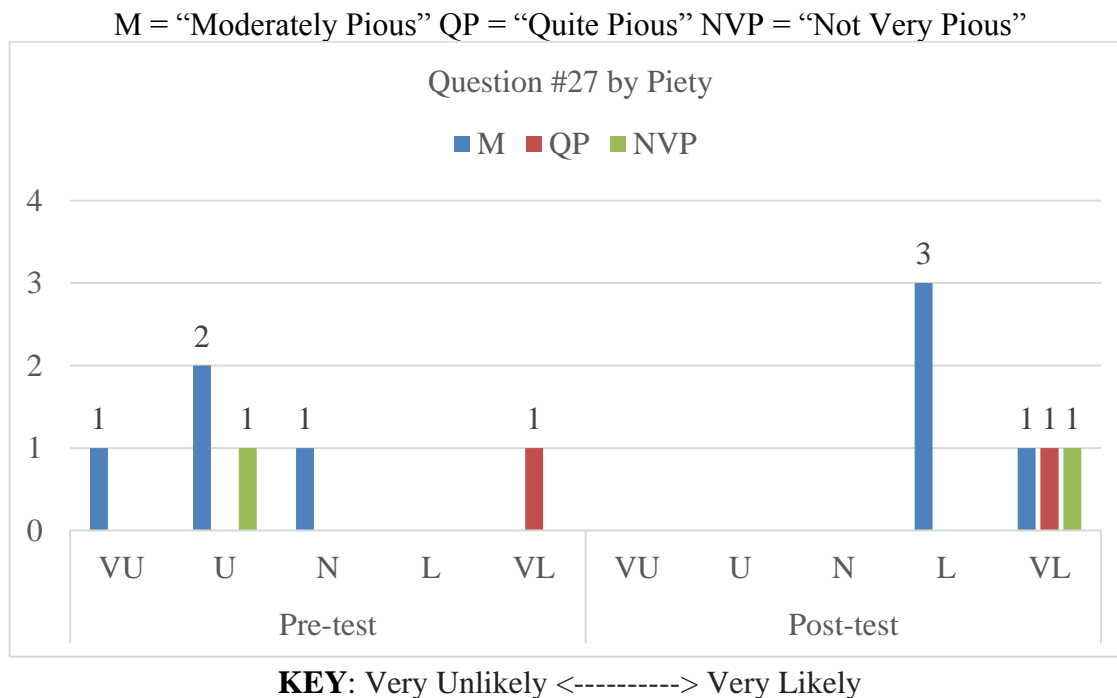
Additionally, the more conservative nature of the churches they pastored might make overt pastoral agendas around ecology politically unwise. One senior pastor noted, “I’m working with folks who have diverse perspectives within the church. There are some opportunities to talk about our response as people of faith and particularly as Adventists ... in ways that open up their

thinking to possibilities that our beliefs and our behaviors can be connected to the preservation or destruction of nature.”⁵⁶³ Moving congregations toward ecology and ecotheology requires grace, space, careful conversation, and time.

Special Sabbaths and Liturgy

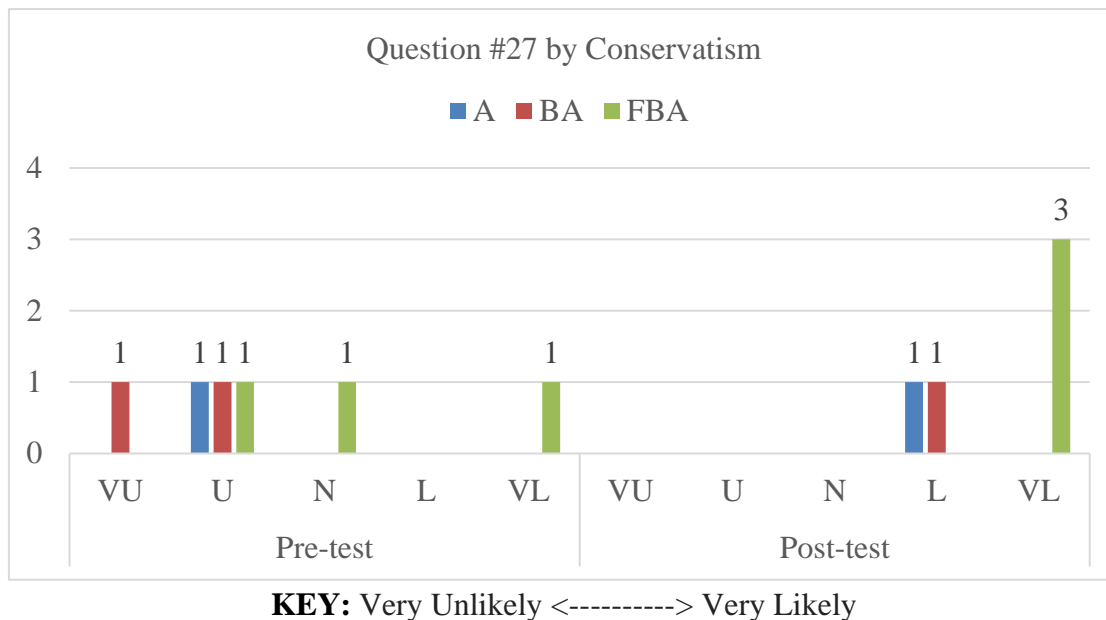
One of the most profound shifts occurred in the cluster of questions (Q27-Q30) around liturgies of mourning and worship services centered on acknowledgment of the state of things environmentally and repentance for a) for our role in depleting, degrading, and polluting the Earth or b) for our role in degrading, dispossessing, misusing, and abusing peoples and animals to support our lifestyles.

Graph 10: *How likely are you to do a liturgy, read a text or a poem, write music or do a music set, produce or show a video that expressed deep sorrow for the state of the earth in your services at church?* Question #27 by congregational piety.



⁵⁶³ P4 I 7

Graph 11. *How likely are you to do a liturgy, read a text, a poem, write music or do a music set, produce or show a video that expressed deep sorrow for the state of the earth in your services at church?* Question #27 by congregational conservatism.



In this graph above, the majority of respondents were “very unlikely” or “unlikely” to answer this question affirmatively in the pre-TSGPP survey. The post-survey demonstrates a complete reversal. Five of six participants, regardless of their personal level of conservatism or self-rated level of piety shifted, now “likely” or “very likely” to lead a creative service that expresses sorrow at the ecological state of the Earth. It does not appear from the data that either congregational conservatism or piety affects the result. While the majority of pastors serving congregations of mixed piety are all less “likely” to do this kind of service, it is not clear why this is so.

It is not too ethically or personally confrontational to generically express sorrow for the state of the earth. It is much more confrontational when we express sorrow for what is happening to people, creatures, and living things. Movement here is presumably more difficult.

Chart 1. *How likely are you to do a liturgy, read a text or a poem, write music or do a music set, produce or show a video that expressed deep sorrow for degrading, dispossessing, misusing and abusing peoples and animals to support the modern, Western way of life in your services at church?* Q28 by congregational piety and conservatism.

Congregational Conservatism	Cong. Piety	Pre-test					Post-test				
		VU	U	N	L	VL	VU	U	N	L	VL
Conservative	M	1								1	
Moderate	QP				1						1
	M			1						1	
Progressive	NVP	1								1	
	M	1								1	
Other	M			1						1	
Total		3	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	5	1

KEY: Very Unlikely <-----> Very likely

The majority of respondents were “very unlikely” or “neutral” on this question. This question shows results that are *important*, as half of the respondents made positive movements in the post-TSGPP survey, with no one indicating they were less than “likely” to engage. All participants, regardless of their personal level of conservatism or self-rated level of piety now indicate they are “likely” or “very likely” to express sorrow that the Western way of life has been not only destructive but has also destroyed peoples, cultures, creatures, and living things. This sorrow, as mentioned above, demands more of us.

The next two questions and charts show responses to very similar questions but with the added layer of “repentance.” Adventists are not typically liturgical, and so deep corporate confessions are rare. To repent implies taking a step beyond recognizing and seeing, moving toward change.

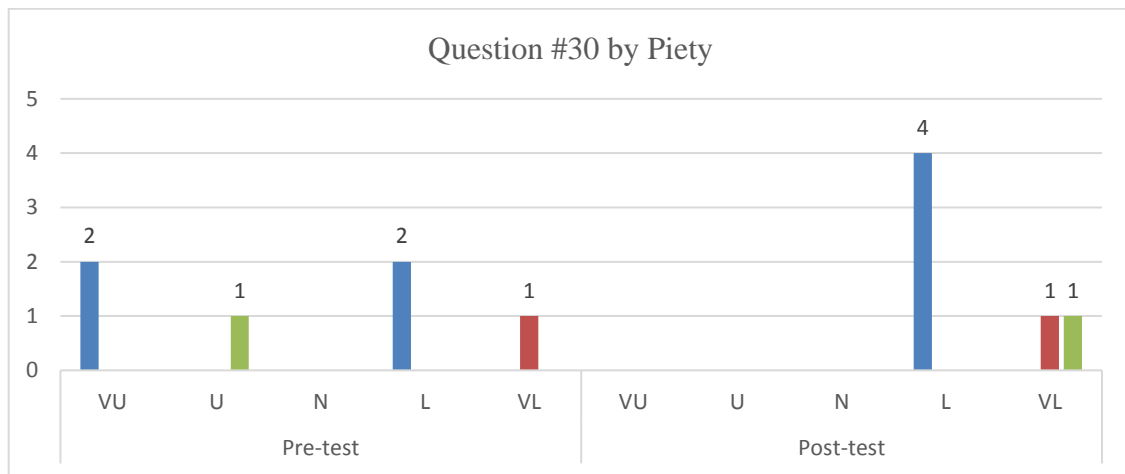
Chart 2. *How likely are you to do a liturgy, read a text or a poem, write music or do a music set, produce or show a video expressing repentance for our role in depleting, degrading and polluting the earth in your services at church?*

Question #29 by congregational conservatism and piety

Congregational Conservatism	Cong. Piety	Pre-test					Post-test				
		VU	U	N	L	VL	VU	U	N	L	VL
Conservative	M	1								1	
Moderate	QP					1					1
	M				1					1	
Progressive	NVP		1								1
	M				1					1	
Other	M				1					1	
Total		1	1	0	3	1	0	0	0	4	2

KEY: Very Unlikely <-----> Very likely

Graph 12: *Question #30. How likely are you to do a liturgy, read a text or a poem, write music or do a music set, produce or show a video that expressed repentance for our role in degrading, dispossessing, misusing and abusing peoples and animals to support our lifestyles in your services at church?* Question #30 by congregational conservatism and piety:



KEY: Very Unlikely <-----> Very likely

In this, the third of four illustrations (Chart 2), the results are *important*, as half made positive movements in the post-TSGPP survey, with no one indicating they were less than “likely” to engage. Even so, it shows an overall remarkable result, in that three pastors were already at “likely” or “very likely” in the pre-TSGPP survey. The same thing appears in the last of the four illustrations (Graph 13). The results are *important*, as half made positive movements in the post-TSGPP survey, with no one indicating they were less than “likely” to do this. Even so, it is a functionally significant result in that three pastors were already at “likely” or “very likely” in the pre-TSGPP survey.

In the cluster immediately above, the four results are similar, each reflecting nuanced differences between two differentiations: 1) sorrow for something vs. repenting of something, which is theologically significant and 2) the state of Earth in general, particularly “depleting, degrading and polluting” vs. the consequences for other inhabitants (people, animal, and living things) by degrading, dispossessing, misusing and abusing” in order to support Western lifestyles. The one pastor who consistently marked all four “very likely” is the most liturgically inclined of the group and perhaps is also one who has journeyed the longest path of ecological thinking. Modes of acknowledgment and vehicles for repentance were modeled in the study. In this cluster, three of four questions showed *important* results. The first showed *significant* results. The closely worded nature of the four questions may have induced fatigue when reading and differentiating the last three questions, and the added layer of personal and corporate responsibility when dealing with people and creatures may have given pause. Further study would be required. Even so, this shows is meaningful movement in worship and in liturgy, which holds promise for corporate awareness on the margins of political consciousness. Liturgies are more than recitations; they are congregational pedagogies.

Soteriology & Heaven

Is the natural world evil? If so, is *all* of it evil? If it is, how can the natural world as Paul experienced speak so definitively of who God is? (Romans 1) And if it is not, what criteria might be used to determine what is good? Aesthetics?

One pastor hoped so. Are there exceptions for that which we love? Will our pets be with us in heaven? This followed a discussion in which it was noted that the Hebrew word transliterated as “Nephesh” and most commonly translated as “soul” refers to sentient creatures, human and otherwise. Might salvation, then, extend to non-human sentient creatures?

This question is an extension of the arguments surrounding heaven and eternal life for humans. What does 1 Cor. 15:35-58 mean when it says we are to be “changed in the twinkling of an eye?” or when Paul speaks of “the resurrection body?” In short, what features of our physical selves are featured in our resurrected bodies so that we will be recognizable to our loved ones?

If violent collisions of tectonic plates caused the mountains to rise, will mountains and waterfalls and snow be part of the earth-made-new, despite the violence of their formation? If soil is formed of rotting vegetation and dung, how is it to be replenished? If life springs from death, what will a world devoid of death look like? Are insects to live forever? If predation is to cease (Isaiah 11), then what of the cycles and rhythms of life as we know it? In short, if earth made new is to be our eternal home, then what features of the earth as we know it are part of the original creation? What about its features will be recognizable? One pastor noted that there is little in the Bible about heaven: “We can hear of the lion and the lamb playing together in Isaiah, but of course we know why, right? Hebrew tradition is not very heaven-oriented.”⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶⁴ P1 I 12.

Another pastor observed that the liberation of a natural world that was not essentially evil would honor the “very intentional, very cyclical nature of the natural world.”⁵⁶⁵ Where do sustainable and perfect ecological cycles fit with the ideas embedded in the notion of sin affecting all nature? There is a sense in which this relates to the coded interview category of “bad theology.” It was suggested “interdependence” is foundational, not sin.⁵⁶⁶

Further, Adventism is born of eschatology, “a tradition that prioritizes or makes the claim that true faithfulness looks like discomfort with the world.”⁵⁶⁷ Recognizing nature as God’s first book seems at odds with the sensibilities of Paul’s natural teleology when read with traditional Adventist hermeneutics. One pastor suggested that if this is so, we need to “feel the courage ... to explore what it means to say that Jesus is coming soon, because the way we’re looking at it now means that Paul was completely wrong.”⁵⁶⁸

As one pastor reflected on childhood and conversion to Adventism, how “heaven was painted as the great reward,”⁵⁶⁹ noting “how little the Bible talked about heaven ... some revelation passages, streets of gold kind of thing ... What is the Bible full of instead? It’s really talking a lot more about how to live and establish a kingdom culture now. Really talks a lot more about life on earth now, not life to come. That’s sure a lot less sexy, but now as I grow a little bit older, I am tremendously grateful for that. Perhaps if we can re-shift that frame within Adventism, maybe there’s some hope for a good theology.”⁵⁷⁰ This statement illustrates the complexities and challenges of an otherworldly solution involving a change in the fundamental

⁵⁶⁵ P5 S3-1 11.

⁵⁶⁶ P1 I 14.

⁵⁶⁷ P1 I 11-12.

⁵⁶⁸ P1 I 11.

⁵⁶⁹ P1 I 12.

⁵⁷⁰ P1 1 2.

natural status of all things. It is not that such belief is beyond faith; rather, no grounded faith can prioritize these uncertainties, particularly in the light of the nearly two-thousand years since Christ prophesied his own soon return (John 14:3, Revelation 22:12). Such otherworldly prioritizations are ecologically and socially disingenuous.

This brings us to another major shift for half the group, an *important* result dealing with the question of soteriology and non-human life. The results below show no emergent pattern, no reason to think that age, gender, or political affiliation was a factor. The change moved all pastors to the position that “salvation” applies to all living things, particularly sentient creatures.

Chart 3: Q23 “To what extent do you think the theological concept of “salvation” pertains to non-human life?” Q23 by Age, Gender and Political Orientation

			Pre-test					Post-test				
Age	Gender	Political orientation	NS	NAA	LW	S	U	NS	NAA	LW	S	U
25-34	Male	Democratic					1					1
	Female	Democratic	1								1	
35-44	Male	Independent		1							1	
	Female	Democratic					1					1
55-64	Male	Democratic					1					1
65+	Male	Independent	1									1
Total			0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	2	4

KEY: Not Sure <---Not at All---Limited Way---Somewhat---> Universally

Chart 4. Q24 “To what extent do you think the theological concept of “salvation” pertains to inanimate creation?” Q24 by Age, Gender, and Political Orientation.

			Pre-test					Post-test				
Age	Gender	Political orientation	It does not	A little	MA	A lot	A great deal	It does not	A little	MA	A lot	A great deal
25-34	M	Dem					1				1	
	F	Dem	1					1				
35-44	M	Ind	1					1				
	F	Dem		1								1
55-64	M	Dem					1					1
65+	M	Ind		1						1		
Total			2	2	0	0	2	2	0	1	1	2

KEY: It doesn't <-----A Moderate Amount-----> A Great Deal

Again, we see no reason to think that age, gender, or political affiliation factored in the answers.

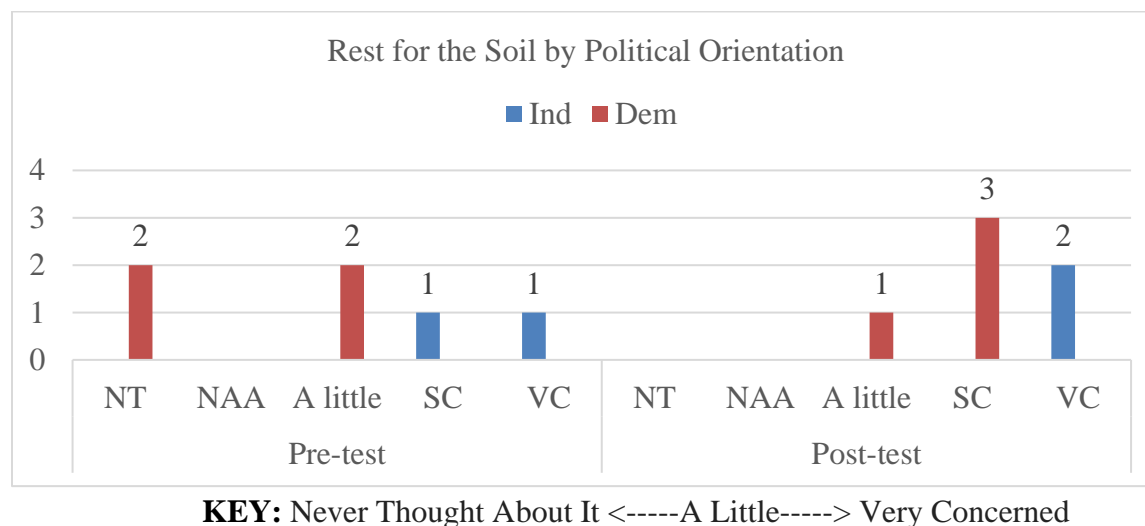
On the question of inanimate creation, one pastor retreated from “a great deal” to “a lot” and two pastors moved from “a little” to “a moderate amount” or “a lot.” No significance here, *per se*, though it is remarkable, given traditional anthropocentric Adventist soteriology and the levels of affirmation of inclusion for inanimate creation, pointing to a God who would redeem everything.

These two charts marking the direction of answers from these questions about soteriology are more meaningful than the evaluation “important” implies. John 3:16 points to a love that’s not anthropocentric, but creation-centric. The God who created in and through Jesus Christ (John 1) not only loves the Son whom God sent to save but also loves the world God sent the Son to save. How can we who believe love or desire any less?

Land Rest and Social Justice

Two questions could have been assigned on Sabbath, but for our purposes here, this will be under the category of Land Rest and Social Justice. The first question is about the land and asks pastors if they, as Adventists, are concerned about the jubilee Sabbaths, particularly land rest? The pre/post-survey results are unequivocal. There was a *significant* shift with four pastors moving toward concern for the land. Though this question was looked at by political party affiliation, this dimension does not seem to have been a factor.

Graph 13: Q38 by political orientation



Debt Relief

The movement here is toward transformation and away from ecological ruin. Poverty is hard on the environment, and so many times the burdens of poverty are carried by people who grow, prepare, cook and serve, our foods. Jesus came to declare freedom for the captives. Humans are part of the interrelatedness that constitutes an environment. Question #39 asked how often pastors preached in support of debt forgiveness or relief for the poorest among us—a Sabbath Jubilee principle also. Again, the results were *significant*. Pastors shifted in this area post-TSGPP (No graph or chart).

Food Praxis

While food was not part of the curriculum in the same way it might have been had we met in person, food as a hermeneutical lens for environmental questions was employed to look at spiritual practices and rituals, such as Communion (Eucharist). Food as ecological praxis was discussed in the context of animal ethics, organics, and foodways in particular. Movement toward “Facility,” the integrative aspects of the curriculum, involved personal practices as well as pastoral leadership toward more congregational embrace and exercise of ecologically implicated consumption. In the pre/post-TSGPP survey, Q25, and Q40 to Q45 particularly focused on these elements (see Appendix B, page 257).

Questions on food included 1) locale, the “where?” of food production; 2) farmer’s markets, the “where is food shipped?” and “who profits?” of food production; 3) the people growing our food, the “who?” of food production (and concomitantly, whether participants would pay more for food or buy it directly to ensure that farmers/farm workers had health insurance, which encompasses questions of ethics and justice); 4) the quest for organics, the “how?” of food production; and 5) advocacy for the use of both local and organic foods in church kitchens—these questions sought to measure change over the course of the intervention.

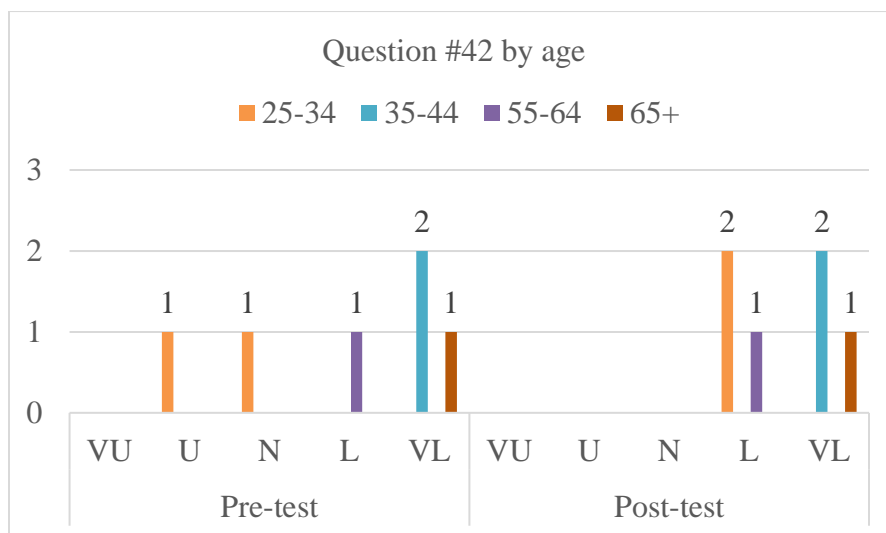
Question #25 revealed that most pastors surveyed already believed that their diets affected the environment, at least a moderate amount, and so there were no major shifts between the pre- and post-surveys. Question #40 initially asked how often participants thought about where their food was grown. Half the group already thought about it “a lot,” or even a “great deal,” so the results are *important*, not *significant*. It’s worth noting that two pastors in the pre-TSGPP survey answered, “not at all!” The framing of the follow-up question in the post-survey transitioned from “how often do you...?” to “are you more or less likely to think about where

your food is grown than before you participated in this study?” 100% of respondents indicated they were “more likely” to do so. This evidences another shift.

Question #41 was formatted and laid out very similarly to Q#40 and asked about how often respondents thought about the people who grow our food. While responses initially ranged from “never” to “always,” 100% of the group indicated they were “more likely” to think of the people who grow their food than before the study. Mindfulness is a great start!

Question #42 asked how likely pastors were to seek organic foods where possible, as shown in the following graph.

Graph 14: *Q42 Likelihood of seeking organics where possible by Age*



KEY: Very Likely<-----Neutral-----> Very Unlikely

At first glance, it seemed as if age was a major indicator, with older pastors more likely to purchase organics. However, age is often related to financial security and increased awareness of or worries about health, not necessarily philosophies of consumption. After participating in the TSGPP, the likelihood of younger pastors purchasing organic foods increased.

Question #43 addressed the value of shopping locally at farmers’ markets. Here, four of six participants shifted in favor of buying at such markets where available. If anything in the pre-

survey, women were less likely than men to shop farmers' markets, though this may be a function of available time, age as related to income, or other factors. Political orientation proved not to be important at all. This is a *significant* result.

Chart 5: Q43, *Shopping farmers markets by Age, Gender and Political Affiliation.*

			Pre-test					Post-test				
Age	Gender	Political orientation	VU	U	N	L	VL	VU	U	N	L	VL
25-34	Male	Democratic	1								1	
	Female	Democratic	1									1
35-44	Male	Independent					1					1
	Female	Democratic		1							1	
55-64	Male	Democratic				1					1	
65+	Male	Independent		1							1	
Total			2	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	4	2

KEY: Very Likely<-----Neutral-----> Very Unlikely

Question #45 demonstrates *significant* results, in that four of six participants indicated that post-TSGPP they would be willing to pay more for food if it meant those growing and harvesting their food had health insurance for their families. The remaining two did not change their answers because they were already “definitely willing” to pay more. A movement toward community!

All of these movements were personal. When it came to shared food practices and the church kitchen, the survey asked how likely the pastor was to encourage food used for church meals to be both locally produced and organic. This is a loaded question, pregnant with implications. Are such foods available? Accessible? Affordable? Actually healthier? Is it

appropriate to ask individuals who have already prepared foods (likely vegetarian) to go to the trouble with these additional concerns? A pastor may be seen as an elitist—or worse, a liberal!

Chart 6: “How likely are you to encourage those preparing meals for the church to shop where produce is locally or organically farmed?” Q44 by Age, Gender, and Political Orientation

			Pre-test					Post-test				
Age	Gender	Political orientation	VU	U	N	L	VL	VU	U	N	L	VL
25-34	Male	Democratic	1							1		
	Female	Democratic			1						1	
35-44	Male	Independent				1						1
	Female	Democratic	1						1			
55-64	Male	Democratic		1					1			
65+	Male	Independent	1							1		
Total			3	1	1	1	0	0	2	2	1	1

KEY: Very Likely <-----Neither Likely or Unlikely-----> Very Unlikely

Before and after the group process, most pastors were unlikely to encourage those preparing meals for church meals to shop where produce is locally or organically farmed. One pastor from a conservative church with considerable resources and a reputation for strong health ministries was willing to promote this, but this was not a significant or important result.

Summary of Results

There are significant shifts of attitude, perspective, theology, and even praxis reflected in the survey. Comprising of forty-five questions, there were few questions that didn’t demonstrate much before/after change. All major clusters showed movement. Most showed *important* results.

Some demonstrated *significant* results. Centered on theological and other moves that were part of the curriculum, the question clusters are movements toward facility.

There is more that could be said on “facility.” The in vivo coding process allowed for this quadrilateral understanding with so much explanatory power. The evidence here points to a positive response to the curriculum. Pastor-participants, generous to a fault, provided far too many insights for one dissertation.

Underlying these factors of fear, fatigue, and futility are some core problems that pastor-participants identified. These issues include a divided view of reality in which sacred and profane occupy two separate realms. With nature assigned to politics, it cannot be sacred; it can only be profane, sinful, fallen, “out there,” other. Another problem is compartmentalization, allowing for the psyche to simply forget that there is something important in the next compartment over.

Noted also were Protestant schismatic tendencies. This supported the claims made regarding embedded organizational coding in chapter three.⁵⁷¹ The impetus to act individually or in separatist ways is a powerful legacy, and it has made journeying together in community (church) difficult.

Essentially, humans are complicit in everything. It is practically impossible to make a truly ecologically positive choice. The way this fact fuels futility, particularly given our helplessness in the face of nature’s fury, can lead to a false sense of either optimism or a deep pessimism. Binary, right-wrong thinking makes it difficult to choose “better” rather than “worse.” It is easy to get stuck.

⁵⁷¹ See page 77.

These named tendencies connect to fatigue, too. We are tired on so many levels, compassion fatigue being the most interesting and compelling of the ways we feel tired.

In addition, it is difficult not to be afraid. Contemporary American politics are charting new territories and have been moving away from accountability and regulation. Extremists of any party or religion are dangerous and make life a challenge for pastors trying to love all in the name of Jesus, do right, and preach/teach what is true.

Biophilia and non-violence are powerful tools, both of which came up in this intervention. They bridge our concerns to emergent facility. In response to the curriculum, we are able to see Sabbath in ecological terms; extend prayer beyond human concerns and lives; and shift toward eco-practices, despite the complexities. Consumerism is something to be interrogated more fully now. Localism and concern for animal life characterize our ecology and our consumption, particularly with food.

“Facility” is a transformation. Pastors’ teachings, examples, lives, and ecological insights will be heard, noticed, observed. Influence will make a difference as we move away from anthropocentrism and apocalyptic escapism and instead see nature as something other than fallen and evil. Salvation might be for a world God loves, not just a people awaiting the Parousia.

Chapter 7 – Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

The stated goal of this dissertation was twofold: first, to understand why Adventists were not interested in food beyond efficacy for health and longevity. Why no environmental interest? Secondly, it aimed to make overtures toward an Adventist ecotheology. These goals were to be accomplished in the context of research questions that go seemingly opposite directions. First, why do Adventists care so much about a literal creation and so little about creation itself as expressed through ecological attitudes, praxis, and theology? The second question asks why we should care for the earth, given a theology that says it is going to be destroyed and made new. In the context of religious education, *The Transformational Small Group Pilot Project* was envisioned as a means to test a curriculum that might answer some of these questions and move pastor-participants toward greater engagement and facility.

Towards an Adventist Ecotheology

The survey had one essay-style question, which asked: “What would you say the Adventist Church’s ‘theology of the earth?’ ought to be?” Not all respondents answered both times, although the aspirational nature of the question allowed for revision. The varied answers points to the *de facto* ecotheology presently implied in Adventist doctrines, writings, and congregational thinking and life, and they offer thoughtful suggestions moving forward.

One pastor put real energy into this with an initial analysis referencing Adventist sexism and historic concerns that arose out of John Harvey Kellogg’s panentheism:

Adventist theology of creation is fundamentally anthropocentric. Yes, God created it all, but humanity was the crowning act of creation. Everything else was created for man. (And yes, the anthropocentrism is intentional.) Furthermore, there seems to be baked into Adventist cultural theology of fear of paganism, pantheism, panentheism which are often identified as “earth religions” and talk of earth theology is often squelched because of

that fear. There have been some significant voices of change in recent years, but I think that what I've described is pretty normal understanding of the ordinary Adventist member.⁵⁷²

That was the first response.

“Adventist cultural theology” is a term that has outstanding explanatory potential. It's not biblical theology, and it's not church politic or policy, nor is it culture *per se*. This term suggests a folk theology that is actually readily identifiable at the margins of the church, connected to historic and Evangelical Fundamentalist Adventisms, which I see ecologically, in this particular context, as a demythologization of the primordial alienating any projected animus which might signal relationship.

The second response to the same question (which changed from “what is?”⁵⁷³ to “what should be?”⁵⁷⁴) was as follows:

[T]he earth is God's creation. It is a place that was created with resources to foster and sustain life. From the tiniest one celled phytoplankton to the largest whale all life is God breathed. Just as life breath is the gift of God the inanimate resources of creation are God's providence. Sin encourages human exploitation of both living and inanimate resources for the purposes of pursuing power, wealth and luxury. This pursuit has unbalanced the delicate systems of creation. Human consumption strips God's created Earth of its rich variety and replaces it with toxic waste. Water, soil and air is polluted to the extent that living creatures cannot thrive. Sinful humanity's destruction of the earth will be key in the final crisis that culminates in the second coming of Christ. God's work of salvation in Jesus demonstrates God's love for the world. The ultimate end of salvation history is the complete renewal of creation.⁵⁷⁵

This stunning paragraph could be adopted as is. It mirrors the confessional quality of Neal Wilson's work, while poetically pointing to the glories of creation, and the hope of renewal.

⁵⁷² P4 Pre-TSGPP Survey, November 20, 2020. Note the reference to one of the Evangelical barriers discussed in Chapter 3, where this is framed more along the lines of “Mother Earth” and Gaia as “New Age” fears.

⁵⁷³ Osmer's “descriptive-empirical” task. See Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008).

⁵⁷⁴ Osmer's “normative” task. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*.

⁵⁷⁵ P4 Post-TSGPP Survey

Starting with the idea that Adventist ecotheology was “pretty vague,”⁵⁷⁶ a thoughtful and stunning declaration came from another participant: “The Earth is a gift from God—one must care about it, just as much as they care about God.”⁵⁷⁷ This appears to draw from the Apostle John’s words, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother [creation], he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20 NIV, [insertion mine]). That nature reveals God (Romans 1) offers a vision of God not just in “the least of these” humans (Matthew 25:25 KJV), but also in creation itself.

Other responses were beautiful, suggesting divine emotion: “God created this planet and loves every aspect of it. We are living with a broken relationship with the planet, that hurts us and all creation. God came to restore a relationship with each other, God, ourselves, and all creation.”⁵⁷⁸ “Ecopain” may be an appropriate filter for reading these types of ecotheologies: “God loves the world, created it, died for it, will restore all that it is good in it, and any participation in damaging that Earth is heartbreaking to Him.”⁵⁷⁹ And “(w)e strive to be faithful stewards of all creation, and promote practices that will renew and restore the Earth’s environment so that generations of plant animal and human life can flourish, as God intends.”⁵⁸⁰

The theme of “bad eschatology” and “bad theology” emerged in a couple of instances in group. Reservations were voiced respectfully and thoughtfully, particularly about Adventist eschatology (which here refers not so much to sequencing and timelines culminating in life eternal, as to a collection of teachings ranging from signs of the second coming to the return of the New Jerusalem to Earth after the millennium). The observations are not scathing or

⁵⁷⁶ P2 Pre-TSGPP Survey.

⁵⁷⁷ P2 Post-TSGPP Survey.

⁵⁷⁸ P5 Post-TSGPP Survey.

⁵⁷⁹ P3 Post-TSGPP Survey.

⁵⁸⁰ P1 Post-TSGPP Survey.

scandalous. Rather, they address the hubris and escapism surrounding common renderings of the doctrine of the second coming of Christ. As one pastor put it, when:

[W]e talk about eschatology, my mind automatically goes to the fact that I belong to a church that was born out of bad theology and bad eschatology, and that's how Seventh-Day Adventism came to exist! And yet I don't always see the humility that you would maybe expect would come from a church whose foundation is bad eschatology. As much as I enjoy the idea of Jesus coming at five o'clock tonight, I also feel I have a responsibility to not live with the assumption that that's happening. I feel this immense responsibility instead.⁵⁸¹

In context, this pastor feels a responsibility to the future generations who await the Parousia and yet must have a functional environment in which to live until this happens. Further, this notion of humility is a strong rebuke to the language of Christ the returning and triumphant King who conquers sin and takes rightful rulership of the earth. The embrace of the “suffering servant” motif might better deflect the hubris of triumphalism and allow vision through humility.

Another pastor, in the context of the question of reconciling Adventist Fundamentalist obsession with the literal truth of Genesis 1-11 and the conflict between creation care and Adventist eschatology noted, “There's a problem with interpretation as well as with what I call an ‘escapist eschatology.’” This participant went on to relate a conversation with a non-Adventist pastor who said, “I could subscribe to a lot of your doctrine, but there's one that really troubles me...It's your escapist eschatology.” The pastor relating this story then said, “I think that maybe we (Adventists) took it a little too extreme... If it was as ‘escapist’ as we may believe it to be, maybe we shouldn't be here 2,000 years after He (Jesus) said He would come.”⁵⁸²

Adventist theology needs tuning—even rebuilding, particularly in light of the crisis before us and Christianity’s present decline and failure to achieve the commonly interpreted

⁵⁸¹ P1 S3-1 10.

⁵⁸² P2 I 12-13.

objective of Matthew 28 and the gospel commission. Christ's return cannot be rightly be tied to the end of the world, for the world has been ending and regenerating for millennia. The world is ending around us constantly, a catastrophe in which we are all implicated and culpable. A world that has ended more accurately evokes Ezekiel's dry bones, not a persecuted but a faithful remnant keeping the commandments until Christ returns.

Discussion

The question of Adventist interest in food beyond health and longevity was answered in the literature review. The short answer is Adventists do care about food both in terms of animal ethics and in terms of environmental impact, though extant writings in these fields are few, and not generally theological in nature. While this research demonstrates room for a more fully developed and embraced ecotheology, there is increasingly high-quality work being done toward a theology of the earth as this topic gains interest, particularly from Adventist writers in the sciences and humanities, ethics and education.

What I did not expect in the course of research was to bump up against varying but effective barriers to an Adventist ecotheology. Those who been writing on these themes, particularly from a theological point, of view are to be commended for their courage. The religio-political movement to the "right" in Adventism has made this work nearly impossible. Religious equivocation is more powerful than people think. In light of this it seemed particularly important to name the barriers and their historical antecedents. It also made sense to listen carefully to select dialogue partners for philosophies (epistemology, aesthetics), hermeneutics, pedagogies, and practices for ways to help people hear again. How can we effectively teach if we do not know what the barriers to learning are and find ways to bypass or overcome those

barriers? This proved, I hope the reader will agree, to be a significant revelation and contribution of the study.

The TSGPP also proved to be a very useful vessel particularly under careful code and covenant around participation and anonymity. It is hard to overestimate the value of this given the fear, fatigue, and sense of futility that emerged alongside insight, emotion, new facilities and commitments. It is worth noting again just how outstanding this small group was! I regret not being able to actually credit the participants by name.

Building a schedule around an entire group's availability proved to be invaluable. Attendance was nearly perfect. Serendipitously, group availability mirrored my chosen format: two days successively, with two days off, and then a mid-session individual check-in followed by two more successive days, followed by a final debrief session to be scheduled later. This schedule modulated intensity, provided both continuation and pause, and gave space for reflection and assigned work.

Beyond the practical lessons learned and the efficacies of Zoom, emergent and re-cast theologies contributed to what shifts might be needed, not only to be better inhabitants but also to create a more sustainable theology. It was powerful to hear pastors name theologies as "bad." It was even more powerful to witness the relational and generational motivations underlying the pursuit of change. At the end of this, the pastoral task is to extend real hope.

The SECC (Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists) has, for many years, sponsored pastors to a retreat ministry process. There are many spiritual practices squarely within the Christian tradition that are not regularly practiced in Adventist churches, particularly very conservative ones. A majority of the participants had been a part of this retreat process. Happily, this may have reduced or removed resistance to the meditative or prayer

exercises and pedagogies proposed in the curriculum. This aspect would not likely be true in all settings. It did serve to demonstrate that in the context of safety, opening up to God through such practices offers something pedagogical methods alone cannot. It also pointed to the efficacy of spiritual practices applied pedagogically in this type of setting.

Limitations

Anthropogenic global warming, with all the concomitant problems attending this phenomenon, as well as all related phenomena and problems subsequent to each of these, is herein assumed. This includes but is not limited to the rise in sea temperatures; polar ice melt; rising sea levels; increased seawater acidity; the death of reef systems; increasing ferocity and frequency of wind events (typhoons, hurricanes, and tornados); deluges causing rainstorms and mudslides; hotter and dryer areas; deglaciation; fires that now burn with greater frequency and ferocity over larger areas of forest for longer periods, destroying proportionately more forest annually; species decline and biodiversity loss; desertification; fresh water shortages and contamination; famine; human conflict; and so much more. It has not been the intention or goal of this dissertation to demonstrate the truth or veracity of climate change or of any other phenomena related to ecological degradation.

This dissertation necessarily explores historical antecedents known or postulated to be germane to the key research questions of this inquiry. Nevertheless, this work is not meant to stand as history or reflect the interests and concerns of historians and historiographers. Rather, the effort is toward documenting past and present realities that offer a framework for understanding why Adventists are not more ecologically minded and where resources to help move Adventists in that direction might be found.

Many Adventists and Evangelicals write to defend their traditions, and more specifically, biblical convictions against the damning charges leveled by Lynn White, Jr.'s seminal article written in 1967,⁵⁸³ citing the "dominion" clause of Genesis 1 (scripture in both Judaic and Christian traditions) and the devaluation of nature as the root of the ecological crisis. White's work has been very influential, and the questions he raises have had a massive impact in this field. Even so, my effort is not toward parsing, analyzing, or addressing his charges. My work is neither apologetic nor a defense of the faith on this score. John Cobb Jr.'s general ascent to White's point resonates, as does the observation that "in the context of civilizations ... we find none that offer us the perspective we now need."⁵⁸⁴ Here Cobb offers the positive and necessary strains of cultural appreciation for the natural world as well as the biblical notion of repentance.

This project is not designed to produce an Adventist ecotheology. A portion of the stated objectives of this dissertation is to contribute towards a constructive project, yes. Literature that moves this direction has been reviewed. The small group process yielded some ideas. Resources to move forward with have been proposed.

This paper is not a biblical exegetical project. Neither is this an attempt to read the writings of Ellen White either as ecological counsel, or to mine ecological material in her writings.⁵⁸⁵ While no Adventist ecotheology would be complete without a careful review and

⁵⁸³ Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967): 1203–7.

⁵⁸⁴ John B. Cobb, Jr., "Foreword," in *Ecotheology in the Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding the Divine and Nature*, Ecocritical Theory and Practice (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2016), x.

⁵⁸⁵ This would be an exercise in eisegesis. Ellen G. White was not an ecologist or ecotheologian. Her writings on nature offer counsel for education, and her thoughts on agriculture have particular relevance today.

exegesis of biblical texts related to the material and created world, this is repeatedly done in many studies. In the Adventist context, this is also true of Ellen White's works.

The intervention (the TSGPP) was of short duration and involved a very small sample of pastors. While pre-and post-test research offers statistical correlation, the sample size of this group was too small to meaningfully infer anything statistically. Numeric and categorical comparisons offer empirical proof of movement but cannot tell us how significant that movement is with mathematical certainty. Generalizing the results and applying them globally, or even to the North American context, is not recommended. The results should be somewhat representative of Adventist clergy in the general locale of the study. Inferences should be made cautiously.

In a study like this, there is always risk associated with self-selection. Given the principles of homophily, am I as, a White investigator, likely to attract persons of color? Is the field of ecology and ecotheology a niche interest in any kind of way? In other words, are climate change deniers likely to self-select for such a study? Is self-selection indicative in any way of socioeconomic status, a question that was not asked? As no one in the study identified as a conservative or historic Adventist, or even a traditional Adventist, would pastors or persons from these Adventisms responded the same way to the curriculum as this group did? There are very real constraints on applicability across ethnic, socioeconomic. and political lines.

Another limitation of the short duration of this intervention may be decay. There is no way to know for certain how lasting changes and shifts are, unless they are truly transformational, which can really only be known fully in time. Transformation, or perhaps ecological conversion, perhaps embodying a range of knowledges and practices, as ecological competence takes time.

Conclusions

The pre-TSGPP and post-TSGPP surveys were clustered around different doctrines, practices and competencies. In the area of land and social ethics, questions covered the jubilee concept of rest for land, as well as recognition, fair pay, and health insurance for farmworkers and their families. In the area of Sabbath as an ecological concept, questions went to the philosophy of Sabbath-keeping and pastoral pedagogies. Eschatological questions focused on how strongly we believe the earth should be taken care of in light of the second coming. Questions having to do with worship involved setting a day apart for ecological religious education and liturgical practices engaging mind and soul in mourning and repentance. Questions on mentoring touched on both homiletics and personal conversation in the ways in which pastors might move congregation toward greater education, understanding, and praxis. Questions about food had much to do with ecological practices like organic farming and localism.

Differences between the pre-TSGPP and post-TSGPP surveys strongly suggest that in most of these categories, there were *important* shifts, and in some categories, there were *significant* shifts. If converted to Likert-type scales, almost all the questions were 5 to 7 points. Movement of several points is likely significant particularly for an individual, particularly if on a 5-point scale, “2” is “not very” and “4” is “quite.” The choice to make worded responses, rather than number-scaled options, was a good one. Movement from “not very interested” to “quite interested” is meaningful. More importantly, group movement would suggest the overall efficacy of the TSGPP within a given category or question, defined as movement toward facility.

The schema that ultimately arose out of in vivo coding yielded insights as to the challenges pastors face in the political zeitgeist of our times. Adventists have followed culture, and as culture has become less wedded to commonly held truths, so with Adventists. While some

will interpret this theologically, the phenomenon is cultural, not doctrinal. Understanding participant response in light of the constructs of futility, fatigue, fear, and facility complemented the surveys. The practical and theological clusters of the surveys evidenced emergent facility, both personal and pastoral. For purposes of this dissertation, that is transformation.

This process succeeded in creating safe space, allowing for the scriptures to be heard anew in ecological terms, engaging in prayer and compassion practices in ways novel to most of the participants, opening minds and hearts to new relational understandings, and turning toward connectivity. Through narrative and visual media, experience widened, and though each voice and experience was entirely unique, we found common ground.

Was the TSGPP “transformational?” This long quote below, a journal entry received after the process, offers perspective. The pastor who sent it had been a source of incredible information and wisdom, particularly on barriers to ecotheology.

After our personal interview, I began to wonder if I’d ever have a sensitive heart again. And then I saw this picture.⁵⁸⁶ Not much had quite jarred me to a truer compassion than the image of this animal surrendered at the feet of a human. There is much peace in his face. In fact, the word that lands home is *trust*.

The animal is placing his entire trust, present and future, safety, and well-being in a human. And of all the elements in this universe that truly move me most are personal accountability and the trust that is placed in me. I could not fathom looking in the mirror and not liking what I see within me. I could not fathom living with a version of myself that corrupts the trust placed in me.

So as the world turns and ages, groans and praises, I stand in the middle of the garden, my version of my garden of Eden. These animals and living creatures are the “least of these” that have placed their trust in me. And they don’t stand alone. Behind their arrival at my feet is the hand of the Divine that has brought them to me with a distinct command to care for the “least of these”, as if I were caring for the Divine herself.

⁵⁸⁶ A picture was included that I wasn’t able to obtain rights to publish. It pictured a week-old miniature horse foal with appaloosa type markings on its hindquarters, lying on its side with its head nestled between the feet of a person who says they are a veterinarian. It’s a moving image, as described. Here’s the link to the actual photo as pictured on reddit:
https://www.reddit.com/r/aww/comments/jkzxnb/im_a_horse_vet_this_adorable_little_guy_fell/

And with that, I weep. I could have a mere jolt in my heart and turn the page with an ADD-fashion and forget the matter within seconds as I scroll past the next post on my social media feed. But the saying, “wherever you go, there you are” has given me a basket that demands I take this image with me, past my scrolling, past my apathy, past my compassion-fatigue, and carry it near my heart, holding me accountable for what has been entrusted to me.

I weep because I didn’t think I was capable of chipping away at my stubborn acts of indifference. I weep because I cannot escape it this time. And yet I feel alive, I feel sad, I feel curious. My world has demanded a version of me that will protect the least of these in a manner that will allow myself to face myself in the mirror and feel satisfied with who I see.

Because I won’t settle for the crumb-versions of caring and protecting the living creatures around me. I won’t settle for the “my thoughts are with you”-versions of caring. I won’t settle for the one-and-done activity that creates a pseudo-version of care. I won’t settle for the “good enough” version of myself.

I will fight to keep my eyes on what matters most: personal accountability. Did I do what was asked of me by the Divine? Did I care for what was entrusted to me in my garden of Eden? And can I be proud of myself at the end of the day for doing all I could do allow my immediate environment not just to survive one more day, but to *thrive enough* to live another day?

For far too long now, was my head at the mercy of my world, as this animal is to the human. I depended on it, was nurtured by it, and yet I abused its generosity. I was the cause of its exhausted groans and its thinning, endangered layers.

But today the roles got reversed. Creation lay its head at my feet and asked me to care for it because she was tired, and because she trusted that I would do the right thing for her.”⁵⁸⁷

My own emotional response to this was immediate, and I too wept. Yes, there was clear evidence of movement over the course of the TSGPP, a success. More importantly, I felt the beauty of all that lives, and the call on my life for greater personal accountability.

⁵⁸⁷ P6 J.

Recommendations for Further Study

Early on, mention was made of Ellen G. White's writings in relationship to ecology. The Adventist Agricultural Association represents an emergent Adventist farm movement. In footnote 76 on page 30, I mention three new Ellen White compilations based on White's counsels to leave the cities and pursue self-sufficiency in the country. This counsel, while not targeted at ecology, proved to be one of the most ecologically viable forces within the church. This bears further investigation as to the extent of the network, particularly how dependent these farms are on fossil fuels, GMO seed, synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides and immigrant labor. Is this network successfully recruiting new farmers? How does it tie into school-based farm programs, such as exist at conservative schools like DayStar Adventist Academy in Castle Valley, Utah?

There is also room for historical research along these lines. Adventist colleges and academies had vital farm and dairy programs from inception through the 1980s. Some programs still exist. What happened to this vision of Ellen G. White's? Are there places this agricultural vision has been maintained? Revived? Or that have been built on these principles and practices? How can this be mainstreamed once again? If this movement is about faithfulness to Ellen White's writings, counsels, or eschatological fears, how should those people who are ecologically motivated interface with this movement?

This dissertation acknowledges that the context of colonialism as relevant to the ecological question in terms of systems of domination, exploitation, and abuse. There is room to explore the historical connection between the changing relationship of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to persons of color in the Reconstructionist Era and the relationship to the environment

and the same period. More broadly, my research suggests that the status of social justice issues and environmental issues may not be dissimilar, particularly within Adventism.

On page 187 of chapter 6, it was noted that a whole book could be done on politics in relationship to Adventists and Ecology. It seems this is so. While this dissertation reflects a great deal of work along these lines, more could be done to unpack or study the political and theological movement to the right in the past 30 years since Dudley and Hernandez wrote their amazing volume on Adventists and politics.⁵⁸⁸

Summary

My abiding hope is that Adventists might become significantly more ecologically attuned in thought and praxis. The institutional DNA that works against the Church offers restoration too. There is much to recommend a return to sectarian convictions around non-violence; body-spirit monism and materiality; separation of Church and State (as opposed to Christian nationalism); rejection of consumerism; advocacy for simplicity of lifestyle; and commitment to society through address of social and social justice issues. As with systemic racism, sexism, and other tacit and deep-seated sins embedded in culture and positionalities of privilege and power, movement will take a deep reassessment of those beliefs that appear to support life as we currently live it. Pedagogies and practices that disrupt and bypass embedded resistances within Adventism, Evangelicalism and beyond are modeled in this dissertation. Eschewing escapist eschatologies in favor of discovering or rediscovering God's love for all God's creation and living that love in respectful, mindful connectedness may get to our deepest desires, our greatest creaturely potential. There is no time left to debate the path forward. The world is burning...

⁵⁸⁸ Roger L. Dudley and Edwin I. Hernandez, *Citizens of Two Worlds: Religion and Politics Among American Seventh-day Adventists* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1992).

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Appendix A – “Stewardship of the Environment” by Neal C. Wilson

Adventist Review

July 26 – August 2, 1990

Proposed SDA Position Statements

GC Leaders Target Concerns for the Adventist Church

Neal C. Wilson, Former GC President

Responding to social issues frequently raised in the United States and overseas, General Conference leaders released the following statements during the fifty-fifth session of the church. Although these statements were not discussed or voted by the session, they fairly represent the position of the church.

Stewardship of the Environment

As the industrial revolution peaked during the past century, smokestacks rising high into the air signaled progress, heralds of a golden age of prosperity and plenty. But no longer. Today, thinking people everywhere realize that uncontrolled technology has placed our entire environment in peril.

More than any other generation before us, we have pillaged the resources of our planet in an insatiable hunger for material comfort, gadgets, and new technologies. In our greed for more, we have wantonly exploited the earth as though its bounties were inexhaustible.

We have in the process created hazardous products that defy safe disposal. Using the ocean as a giant garbage dump, we have acted as if it were a bottomless pit capable of absorbing unlimited refuse and sewage. On land, acid rain, a lethal shower of our own creating, descends upon lake and forest, slowly killing off the fish stock and microscopic vegetation vital to the ecosystem. Our forests are dying. Our air is polluted. The protective ozone layer is threatened.

As our planet emerged from the hands of the Creator, He pronounced it both good and perfect. But through sin it became fragile—needing to be dressed and kept (Gen. 2:15). Instead, we have misused it for the sake of our own profit motive and selfish creature comforts. Our behavior is not only irresponsible—it becomes even immoral.

The crisis is not simply economic and political. It is also moral and spiritual, for it impinges on our relationship to our Creator as stewards of His creation (Gen. 1:26-28). With our strong belief in Creation—a doctrine that lies at the heart of the message of Revelation 14—Seventh-day Adventists should stand at the forefront of the struggle to save the planet. In our lifestyle, our personal witness, and every appropriate public forum, we ought to seek to raise the consciousness of all people regarding this creeping danger to the environment.


Many advanced societies not only squander their own resources, but draw from less-advanced cultures, depleting their national wealth, jeopardizing their futures, and creating economies dependent on the exploitation of diminishing resources. The church sees the world as a whole, and accepts the responsibility created by the command “Love thy neighbour” [sic] as including the need for all to govern the use of resources and preserve the environment without societies protecting their economies and lifestyles at the expense of the less-advantaged areas.

Our belief in the imminence of the Second Advent does not diminish this responsibility, for Christ tells us to occupy until He comes (Luke 19:13). Ecological responsibility and the belief in the imminent Advent are not mutually exclusive. Both must characterize Adventists. We call upon leaders in industry to act responsibly and morally—in the interest of both the present and future. We call upon local, national, and international governments and authorities to enact such appropriate measures as would ensure the safety and well-being of an environment on the brink of catastrophe. We call upon all Adventists to highlight and, where necessary, recapture the meaning of Christian stewardship, and declare in word and life that this is still our Father's world.

The above is a portion of the full article and has been reprinted with permission from the *Adventist Review*.

Appendix B – Pre/Post TSGPP Survey

(Pre to Post changes noted in “NOTES” below)



CLAREMONT
SCHOOL OF
THEOLOGY

AT WILLAMETTE
UNIVERSITY

THE PASTOR, THE CHURCH & ECOLOGY

Pretest for The Transformative Small Group Pilot Project

SECC Pastors with Greg Hoenes, PhD Candidate
Claremont School of Theology

1. As a Pastor, I serve a

☐ single congregation

☐ district of congregations, or network of congregations

☐ ministry within a congregation - I specialize.

2. What is your age?

☐ 18-24 ☐ 45-54

☐ 25-34 ☐ 55-64

☐ 35-44 ☐ 65+

3. What is your gender?

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Prefer not to say

4. Politically, how would you describe your views?

☐ Anarchist ☐ Democratic

☐ Libertarian ☐ Democratic Socialist

☐ Tea Party ☐ Socialist

☐ Traditional Republican ☐ Communist

☐ Independent ☐ Unaffiliated

☐ Other:

5. How would you describe your position as an Adventist?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Progressive Adventist (emphasize adaptability of faith to current context) | <input type="radio"/> Evangelical Fundamentalist Adventist (emphasizing sola scriptura, and literalist hermeneutics, nationalistic) |
| <input type="radio"/> Mainline/Traditional Adventist (emphasis on Adventist uniqueness) | <input type="radio"/> Historic Adventist (concerned that Ellen White be properly used, value writings and theologies of our pioneers) |
| <input type="radio"/> Evangelical Adventist (emphasis on the centrality of Christ and gospel) | |

6. How conservative theologically do you consider your congregation to be?

- ☐ Far above average
☐ Above average
☐ Average
☐ Below average
☐ Far below average
☐ Other (please specify)

7. How conservative theologically do you consider yourself to be?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Far above average | <input type="radio"/> Below average |
| <input type="radio"/> Above average | <input type="radio"/> Far below average |
| <input type="radio"/> Average | <input type="radio"/> Not at all |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify) | |

8. How religious - that is to say pious, faithful in spiritual practices, and careful to attend religious functions would you say you are?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Very pious, religiously faithful | <input type="radio"/> Not very pious |
| <input type="radio"/> Quite pious, generally religiously faithful | <input type="radio"/> Not at all - I'm rather disengaged from traditional measures of piety |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat pious | |

2

NOTE: The Post-TSGPP Survey Left questions #6 & #7 BLANK.

9. How pious, faithful in spiritual practices, and careful to attend religious functions would you say your congregation is?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Very pious, religiously faithful | <input type="radio"/> Not very pious, we struggle with spiritual practices, and calendars are full, particularly with school and sports |
| <input type="radio"/> Quite pious, generally religiously faithful | <input type="radio"/> Not at all - rather disengaged from traditional measures of piety |
| <input type="radio"/> Mixed, some are - some aren't pious. Some attend, some don't | |

Other (please specify)

10. How important would you say recognition of Earth Day or a special day on ecology/environmental stewardship is in the life of your congregation at this time?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Not at all important | <input type="radio"/> Very important |
| <input type="radio"/> Not so important | <input type="radio"/> Extremely important |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat important | |

Tell me more!:

11. How likely are you to advocate in your church for an Earth Day program or a special worship service related to earth stewardship, ecology, or environmental preservation?

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Very likely | <input type="radio"/> Unlikely |
| <input type="radio"/> Likely | <input type="radio"/> Very unlikely |
| <input type="radio"/> Neither likely nor unlikely | |

Comments:

12. How often do you preach on Earth Stewardship/Ecology/Preservation of the Environment?

- ☐ Almost all my sermons have ecological content
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Once a quarter
- ☐ About every six months
- ☐ Once a year
- ☐ Every 3-5 years
- ☐ Don't recall last time preached on this theme
- ☐ Clarification/Comment:

13. How often do you feel/think you should be incorporating Earth Stewardship/Preservation of the Environment into your sermons?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> More than once a month | <input type="radio"/> Once a year |
| <input type="radio"/> Once a month | <input type="radio"/> Once every 3-5 years |
| <input type="radio"/> Once a quarter | <input type="radio"/> Never |
| <input type="radio"/> A couple times a year | |

Tell me more!

14. How concerned are you about global warming and the ongoing environmental crisis?

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Not at all | <input type="radio"/> A lot |
| <input type="radio"/> A little | <input type="radio"/> Very much so |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat | |

Would you like to say more about this?

4

NOTE: The Post-TSGPP Survey Left questions #12 BLANK.

15. How often do you privately or publicly discuss global warming or the environmental crisis with members of your congregation?

☐ More than once a week
 ☐ Twice Yearly
☐ Weekly
 ☐ Yearly
☐ Monthly
 ☐ Can't remember the last time....
☐ Quarterly

Other (please specify)

16. To what extent do you think the Bible speaks to issues relevant to the environment/ecology/earth stewardship?

☐ A great deal
 ☐ A little
☐ A lot
 ☐ Not at all
☐ A moderate amount
 ☐ I don't know

Comment:

17. In light of the second coming of Jesus, does environmental preservation/ecology matter to you?

☐ Not at all
 ☐ A lot
☐ A little
 ☐ A great deal
☐ Somewhat

Why or why not?

18. In light of the second coming of Jesus, do you think environmental preservation/ecology matters to your congregation?

☐ Not at all
 ☐ A lot
☐ A little
 ☐ A great deal
☐ Somewhat

Why or why not?:

5

NOTE: The Post-TSGPP Survey modified #15 to say, “Going forward, how often...” and #18 to say, “Do you think environmental preservation/ecology ought to matter to your congregation?”

19. How significantly has ecological crisis figured into your thinking about eschatology and the "end times"?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Very significantly | <input type="radio"/> Not very significantly |
| <input type="radio"/> Quite significantly | <input type="radio"/> Not significantly at all |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat significantly | |

Tell me more!:

20. To what extent are you motivated to read on any of these topics: Earth Stewardship; Green Movements; Earth Justice; Environmentalism; Ecology; Ecojustice; Animal Ethics; Species Preservation/Biodiversity; "Deep Ecology"; Climate Change/Global Warming; Ecotheology; Ecophilosophy; Ecofeminism; Deforestation; rising ocean levels and/or acidification?

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Not at all | <input type="radio"/> A lot |
| <input type="radio"/> A little | <input type="radio"/> A great deal |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat | |

What are you reading on these topics, if anything?

21. To what extent are you motivated to encourage your congregants to read on any of these topics: Earth Stewardship; Green Movements; Earth Justice; Environmentalism; Ecology; Ecojustice; Animal Ethics; Species Preservation/Biodiversity; "Deep Ecology"; Climate Change/Global Warming; Ecotheology; Ecophilosophy; Ecofeminism; Deforestation; or Ocean Level Rise or Acidification?

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Not at all | <input type="radio"/> A lot |
| <input type="radio"/> A little | <input type="radio"/> A great deal |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat | |

Why or why not?

NOTE: The Post-TSGPP Survey modified #19 to say, "Going forward, how..."

22. To what extent are you motivated to preach on any of these topics: Earth Stewardship; Green Movements; Earth Justice; Environmentalism; Ecology; Ecojustice; Animal Ethics; Species Preservation/Biodiversity; "Deep Ecology"; Climate Change/Global Warming; Ecotheology; Ecophilosophy; Ecofeminism; Deforestation; or Ocean Level Rise or Acidification?

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Not at all | <input type="radio"/> A lot |
| <input type="radio"/> A little | <input type="radio"/> A great deal |
| <input type="radio"/> Somewhat | |

Tell me more!

23. To what extent do you think the theological concept of "salvation" pertains to non-human life?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Not at all. | <input type="radio"/> Universally (all life) |
| <input type="radio"/> In a very limited way (intelligent life) | <input type="radio"/> I'm not sure. |
| <input type="radio"/> Significantly (all sentient life) | |

Tell me more....

24. To what extent do you think the theological concept of "salvation" pertains to inanimate creation?

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> It doesn't | <input type="radio"/> A lot |
| <input type="radio"/> A little | <input type="radio"/> A great deal |
| <input type="radio"/> A moderate amount | |

25. To what extent do you think your diet effects the environment?

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> A great deal | <input type="radio"/> A little |
| <input type="radio"/> A lot | <input type="radio"/> Not at all |
| <input type="radio"/> A moderate amount | |

26. Do you think about Sabbath in ecological terms?

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Always | <input type="radio"/> Rarely |
| <input type="radio"/> Usually | <input type="radio"/> Never before now |
| <input type="radio"/> Sometimes | |

27. How likely are you to do a liturgy, read a text, a poem, write music or do a music set, produce or show a video that expressed deep sorrow for the state of the earth in your services at church?

☐ Very likely
 ☐ Unlikely
☐ Likely
 ☐ Very unlikely
☐ Neither likely nor unlikely

28. How likely are you to do a liturgy, read a text, a poem, write music or do a music set, produce or show a video that expressed deep sorrow for degrading, dispossessing, misusing and abusing peoples and animals to support the modern, Western way of life in your services at church?

☐ Very likely
 ☐ Unlikely
☐ Likely
 ☐ Very unlikely
☐ Neither likely nor unlikely

29. How likely are you to do a liturgy, read a text, a poem, write music or do a music set, produce or show a video that expressed repentance for our role in depleting, degrading and polluting the earth in your services at church?

☐ Very likely
 ☐ Unlikely
☐ Likely
 ☐ Very unlikely
☐ Neither likely nor unlikely

30. How likely are you to do a liturgy, read a text, a poem, write music or do a music set, produce or show a video that expressed repentance for our role in degrading, dispossessing, misusing and abusing peoples and animals to support our lifestyles in your services at church?

☐ Very likely
 ☐ Unlikely
☐ Likely
 ☐ Very unlikely
☐ Neither likely nor unlikely

31. Does your church have a recycling program?

☐ Yes
☐ No

32. When your church does events, potlucks, or hosts meals, do you use plastic disposables such as table clothes, cups, utensils, and/or styrofoam cups?

☐ Yes
☐ No

8

NOTE: The Post-TSGPP Survey modified #31 to say, “If your church doesn’t have a recycling program, how likely are you to start one?” and #32 to say, “Going forward, when your church does events, potlucks, or hosts meals, how likely is it that you’ll advocate for less reliance on plastic disposables such as table clothes, cups, utensils, and/or Styrofoam cups?”

33. How often to you worship outdoors, or hold Sabbath Schools in natural surroundings?

☐ Monthly
 ☐ Annually

☐ Twice annually
 ☐ More than one time per month

☐ Quarterly

34. How often do you personally find space "in nature" to exercise, rest, or study the flora, fauna, aviary life, etc?

☐ Every day
 ☐ A few times a month

☐ A few times a week
 ☐ Once a month

☐ About once a week
 ☐ Less than once a month

35. How do you teach/explain the Sabbath to people interested in becoming Adventist?

36. Does ecology or environmental preservation ever come up in your teachings about the Sabbath?

☐ A great deal
 ☐ A little

☐ A lot
 ☐ None at all

☐ A moderate amount

37. When you teach Sabbath, do you discuss specifics of practice in ways connected to a theology of rest?

☐ A great deal
 ☐ A little

☐ A lot
 ☐ None at all

☐ A moderate amount

38. As Adventists, we don't typically observe the Sabbaths of Jubilee. How concerned are you that Farmers rest the soil?

☐ Never thought about it
 ☐ Somewhat concerned

☐ Not at all concerned
 ☐ Very concerned

☐ A little concerned

39. Another Sabbath Jubilee question... How often do you preach in support of debt forgiveness or relief for the poorest and most disadvantaged among us?

☐ Never thought about it
 ☐ On occasion

☐ Never
 ☐ Regularly

☐ Rarely
 ☐ Often

9

NOTE: In the post-survey, #35 is #37 and was modified to say, "How will you teach ... in light of ecology?" "In the future, do you think ecology..." or "In the future, when you teach Sabbath, how likely is it..." #36 became #35 and also took a future tense. "In the future, do you think ..."

40. How often do you think about *where* your food is grown?

☐ A great deal
 ☐ A little
☐ A lot
 ☐ None at all
☐ A moderate amount

41. How often do you think about the people who grow your food?

☐ Always
 ☐ Rarely
☐ Usually
 ☐ Never
☐ Sometimes

42. How likely are you to purchase foods that are organic when available?

☐ Very likely
 ☐ Unlikely
☐ Likely
 ☐ Very unlikely
☐ Neither likely nor unlikely

43. How likely are you to shop farmers markets?

☐ Very likely
 ☐ Unlikely
☐ Likely
 ☐ Very unlikely
☐ Neither likely nor unlikely

44. How likely are you to encourage those preparing meals for church to shop where produce is locally or organically farmed?

☐ Very likely
 ☐ Unlikely
☐ Likely
 ☐ Very unlikely
☐ Neither likely nor unlikely

45. Would you be willing to pay more for food if it meant that those growing and picking it had health insurance for their families?

☐ Definitely would
☐ Probably would
☐ Probably would not
☐ Definitely would not

46. What would you say the Adventist Church's "theology of the earth" is?"

10

NOTE: Questions #40 & # 41 were modified to say, "Are you more or less likely to think about..." Question #46 was modified to reflect Osmer's normative task, "What ought to be..."

Appendix C – Eucharistic Prayer

By Greg Hoenes,
December 1, 2020

O Father,

You sent your Son to teach us how to live.

He came in the flesh, vulnerable and naked.

He became one of us

learning our languages, our customs, our manners,

eating our foods,

wearing our clothes,

playing in our streets, walking down our roads...

He worked in our quarries, and paid taxes to imperial Rome.

He took his place among the rabbis, teaching and worshipping, reading and praying.

We delivered Him to death, but Death could not hold Him.

We are now to partake of Him.

Learning His ways,

eating His feasts in remembrance of Him.

Wearing His righteousness like an ill-fitting robe,

journeying His path, though easily diverted.

We work to steward, remembering His ownership.

We worship, reading scripture, praying, and teaching.

We would the Son come again! And until that day,

we seek to eat as Jesus would,

in gratitude and inclusiveness, and in community.

Amen.

V I T A

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PROFESSIONAL MINISTRY SERVICE

Southern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1997 to Present

Director, West Region, 2015 – Present

Senior Pastor, Santa Clarita Church, 2004-2015

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Senior Pastor, Hollywood Adventist Church, 1997-2004

Central California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1/89-12/96

Associate Pastor for Administration, Fresno Central Church, 1996

Interim Senior Pastor, Fresno Central Church, 1995-1996

Associate Youth/Young Adult Pastor, Fresno Central Church/Caruthers – 1992-1995

Ministerial Intern/Assistant Pastor, Visalia Church, 1989-1990

Ministerial Intern/Assistant Pastor, Clovis Church, 1989

Pacific Union College / Northern California Conference

Religion Columnist, *Campus Chronicle*, Pacific Union College, 1987-1988

Ministerial Extern, Concord Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1986-1987

Student Missions: ESL Instructor / Director, 1985-1986

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SCC Representative, University Constituency Session, May 2014

Monterey Bay Academy, La Selva Beach, CA

Invited Member, Alumni Board, 1996-1998

ACADEMIC / RESEARCH INTERESTS

- ❖ Practical Theology
 - Pastoral Theology
 - Religious Education
 - Spiritual Development
 - Liberation & Social Justice Theologies
 - Whiteness: race, complexity, and identity
 - Postcolonialism, Political Theology
 - Anthropology, Gender Studies & Visual Media Culture
 - ❖ Ecotheology / Ecojustice / Ecology
 - Food and Religion
 - Food and Spirituality
 - ❖ Christian History, Adventist History
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CREDENTIALS & AWARDS

- ❖ La Sierra University, School of Religion, “Rising Star Award” (2010)
 - ❖ Ministerial Credential (Ordained 1995)
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NETWORKING & MEDIA

- ❖ LinkedIn: [/in/greg-hoenes-8591555/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/greg-hoenes-8591555/)
- ❖ Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/greg.hoenes.3/>
- ❖ Academic Blog: <https://hoenesacademic.wordpress.com/>